Let Go, Forgive and Set Yourself Free

Workbook

Unit One: Let Go

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Introduction

This unit contains written and experiential exercises that you can do at your own pace. Do not worry. We provide written instructions for this component of our work together. We will meet for live sessions to reinforce and encourage you to keep on keeping on.

In this course, you will learn the meaning of mindfulness and discover how you can take your power back. You will receive tools to use to uncover your deeply seated core beliefs and reframe your thoughts.

You will learn the joy of success when you make intentional choices and experience the results-the empowered, happy you. You have the power to change your trajectory now. You have choices-just like you can solve math problems in multiple ways. You are an adult. You get to make your own choices. So, buckle in. Buckle down. Put your own hands on the steering wheel. Come with me on this ride called empowerment.

The following pages contain experiential and written exercises including instructions regarding how to complete them. There is not a one-size-fits-all tool. Feel free to review, try and choose the exercises that resonate most with you. I encourage you to put together a Mindfulness Tool Kit or an Emotional First Aid Kit that fits your style so that you may readily pull up the exercises whenever you need them. You may wish to print out exercises and have hard-copy visuals at your fingertips or put them in a folder on your computer or smart device. The intent here is that you have your own toolbox with you forever.

Written Exercises

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Don’t believe Everything You Think

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is evidence-based and used by professional therapists to treat patients. The Happy for No Reason Model is so successful because it draws from these techniques. If you feel working with a therapist would be more productive, I encourage you to trust your gut.

You are capable of learning and using these same techniques intentionally to create the authentic you within you.

The author of the following worksheets has granted people like me, who took her course to share them with others. So, let’s get started.

Don’t Believe Everything You Think

Change Your Self-Talk

Did you know? You have over 60,000 (sixty thousand) thoughts each day. Not only that, but you repeat at least 80% of those thoughts each successive day, and 95% of those thoughts are negative. This is because your mind is preprogrammed by human design; you have a built-in negativity bias. This preprogramming was essential for primitive humans. It kept us safe. It caused us to go into fight/flight/freeze/fawn responses when predators threatened us. These responses are automatic and help us protect ourselves. It worked wonderfully in prehistoric times to protect us from lions, tigers, and bears. Oh my!

In our current day experience, we are still wired this way to protect ourselves. But we, the human species, have evolved tremendously. We are more mobile with planes, trains, and automobiles. Technology has advanced so immensely that we are expected to meet productivity quotas, multitask and perform instantly. Now the tigers that threaten us

are over-busy schedules, bosses, and children, and even our own expectations for instant gratification. Is it any wonder our lives feel so chaotic? Is it any wonder we feel anxious or sad if we cannot measure up to our own, let alone, everyone else's standards?

So, how did all this shape who we are today? As children, we are like sponges. We absorb everything and everything people say to us or about us. The media portrays images of sculpted men and women who have it altogether.

We believe everything our adults say and do. Why wouldn't we? After all, they are our elders. They must know what they are talking about.

The truth is that our elders got shaped by life too. As children, our brains are not mature enough yet to know there are multiple ways to solve problems, multiple ways to complete tasks.

At around age 12 or 13, we begin to learn deductive reasoning skills. For example, how many different math equations are there to reach the answer of 25? Let us enumerate them: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and more. You can do the math if you wish.

So, now you are an adult. What happened to cause you to be anxious, doubt yourself, feel confused and even afraid? Likely you thought you should be able to trust others and did not learn to trust your gut.

Cognitive Behavioral Worksheets: Instructions

These three worksheets are about recognizing thinking errors or cognitive distortions, disputing the irrational thoughts, and reframing those thoughts. You don't need to believe everything you think anymore. You can dispute irrational thoughts and replace them with rational responses.

The field of Neuroplasticity has shown us that we can weaken unhelpful, negative thinking neuropathways and build and strengthen new, helpful thinking neuropathways or thinking patterns. The more we strengthen healthy thinking pathways, the stronger our ability will be to stay centered in healthy, helpful thinking. The key is to intentionally engage in healthy thinking patterns to keep ourselves focused and centered. These new, healthy thinking patterns will actually decrease your tendency to be hijacked by anxious and depressive thoughts. You will find you are able to engage productively in present moments.

Try the following worksheets to practice the skill of reframing your thoughts. If these worksheets are helpful, add them to your Mindfulness Tool Kit or Emotional First Aid Kit.

Worksheet 1

The first worksheet, Examples of Cognitive Distortions, is a list of common thinking errors. The exercise at the bottom simply invites you to write down an automatic thought and assign a cognitive distortion to it. The object of this exercise is to become aware of the tendency to engage in faulty thinking that keeps us stuck. It's an awareness building exercise.

Examples of Cognitive Distortions

With Permission of Judith Belmont, MS, LPC
www.belmontwellness.com

The following are some thought habits that cause anxiety, depression, and self-judgment.

1. ALL OR NOTHING THINKING - Things are seen in black or white categories. If you make a mistake; you might think that you "failed" and or are a "failure."

2. OVERGENERALIZATION - You generalize from a specific. You think in absolutes, like "always" "never" and see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern.

3. MENTAL FILTER - You pick out a negative single event and dwell on it, like a drop of ink that discolors a whole beaker of water.

4. MAGNIFICATION OR MINIMIZATION- You either blow things out of proportion or deny

something is a problem when it is. Examples: “I am the worst mother ever” to “It’s nothing - Not a big deal (when it really is to you.)

5. SHOULD STATEMENTS - Having pre-conditions on how you and other people “should” be. Judgmental and unforgiving expectations create a lot of anxiety.

6. PERSONALIZATION - You are self-conscious and think things are about you when it is just an interpretation. You think if someone is angry or negative it is in response to you and then blame yourself.

7. PLAYING THE COMPARISON GAME - Comparing yourself to others and needing to keep up with or outshine others to feel good about yourself. “He is so much smarter than - I’m stupid.”

8. FORTUNE TELLING - You think that you can predict the future and convince yourself that bad things will happen. “I will always have these problems!”

9. LABELING - You label yourself or others by terms such as “lazy” “fat” “stupid” “loser” “jerk”, stating them like they are facts. A label becomes an evaluation of self-worth.

Exercise

Below, write some examples of your own anxiety-producing thoughts and choose one or more anxiety-producing thought habit or cognitive distortion it demonstrates.

Example: I am a loser and always will be labeling, fortune telling, all or nothing thinking

Automatic Thought:

Cognitive Distortion:

Automatic Thought:

Cognitive Distortion:

Automatic Thought:

Cognitive Distortion:

Worksheet 2

Disputing Irrational Thoughts

This worksheet, Disputing Irrational Thoughts, builds on the previous exercise. The first two steps are the same as the previous exercise. The third step is to come up with a more rational response. For example, your automatic thought might be "People don't care about me". The cognitive distortion might be magnification/minimization or overgeneralization. Then replace that automatic thought with something like "My girlfriend's family includes me, and I feel welcome with them." "At the PDX LAN people were interested in my exhibit. I even entered in a contest and won third prize."

Automatic Thought:

Cognitive Distortion:

Rational Response:

Automatic Thought:

Cognitive Distortion:

Rational Response:

Automatic Thought:

Cognitive Distortion:

Rational Response:

Worksheet 3

ABCDE Diary – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

ABCDE DIARY (Diary for Identifying, Challenging, and Changing Irrational Beliefs)

Cognitive Therapy at Work

The third activity is the ABCDE Diary. This is much like the other two exercises, but it breaks down the process more specifically and can be used with an activating event. See examples below.

A is where you describe the activating event.
“ . . . my parents didn’t understand my feelings and concerns about the art institute. They labeled my feeling instead of asking me about my feelings and concerns.”

B is where you write in your automatic thought or belief. “I am not loveable.”

C is where you write down some of the consequences of the event and thought. For example, I shut down, I don’t initiate conversations, I often feel alone even when I am with people.

Under D, write a more positive or helpful thought that you want to work on such as “My girlfriend’s family welcomes and includes me.”

Finally, E is where you write in some of the effects of the D. For example, when you read or say the D out loud or to yourself, do you feel calmer? Do you remember feeling welcome? What does it feel like? Do you see there are people who care about you?

Activating Event:

Belief:

Consequences:

Statement That Disputes the Irrational Belief:

List of Effects of Rational Belief:

A

B

C

D

E

The Pillar of the Mind

Don't Believe Everything You Think – The Work

Question Your Thoughts: Enter a belief or a judgment on the line below and then question it in writing using the following questions and turnaround:

Write your belief here:

1. Is it true?

2. Can you absolutely know that it's true? (Can you really know what is best in the long run for your path or another person's path?)

3. How do you react when you believe that thought? What happens? (How do you treat yourself and others when you believe that thought?)

4. Who would you be without that thought? (How would you live life differently if you didn't believe that thought?)

Then turn the thought around. (Is that as true or truer?) For each turnaround, find three genuine examples of how the turnaround is true in your life.

This is not about blaming yourself or feeling guilty. It's about discovering alternatives that can bring you peace. When we do The Work, we free ourselves from the effects of believing stressful thoughts such as "I'm not good enough," "He doesn't love me," "She doesn't under-stand me," "I'm too fat," "I need more money," and "Something terrible is going to happen." We can turn our stress, frustration, and anger into a freedom that we never dreamed possible.

For a more complete description of how to use The Work, go to www.thework.comUsed by permission of Byron Katie.

Name the Shame

Purpose: Bring unconscious shame into awareness.

Instructions:

- **Write down any situation where you feel a strong, painful emotional reaction:**

- **Ask:**
  - **“What am I believing about myself right now?”**

  - **“Is this belief based on a truth, or on fear or past experience?”**

- **Example: “I feel like I’m a failure.” → Reflect: “Is that really true?”**

- **Rewrite the belief with compassion:**
  “I made a mistake, but that does not make me a failure.”

Guilt vs. Responsibility Inventory

Purpose: Distinguish healthy guilt from toxic shame.

Instructions:

- **Make a list of things you feel guilty or ashamed about.**

- **For each item, ask:**
  - **“Did I actually do something wrong?”**
  - **“Have I made amends or taken responsibility?”**
  - **“Is this guilt productive or punishing?”**

- **Release what you cannot control or what belongs to someone else.**

The Inner Child Dialogue

Purpose: Heals self-criticism by nurturing the wounded parts of the self.

Instructions:

- **Write a letter from your adult self to your younger self (choose an age where you felt hurt or unloved).**
- **Offer empathy, validation, and love.**
- **You can also write a response as your younger self.**

Why it works:

- **Creates integration between different parts of your identity and replaces internal shame with love.**

Schwartz, R. C. (2021). *No bad parts: Healing trauma and restoring wholeness with the Internal Family Systems model*. Sounds True. OK

The Inner Child Dialogue Continued

Write a letter from your adult self to your younger self (choose an age where you felt hurt or unloved).

The Inner Child Dialogue Continued

Write a response as your younger self.

Rewriting the Narrative

Purpose: Shift from a shame/guilt story to a healing one.

Instructions:

- **Write a short narrative about an event you feel guilt or shame about.**
- **Then rewrite the story from a compassionate third-person perspective (as if you're telling the story of a beloved friend).**

Focus on context, intentions, and what you've learned.

Rewriting the Narrative Continued

Write a short narrative about an event you feel guilt or shame about.

Rewriting the Narrative Continued

Rewrite the story from a compassionate third-person perspective (as if you're telling the story of a beloved friend).

Self-Compassion Letter Writing

Purpose: Reduces shame and self-criticism; fosters kindness toward the self.

Instructions: Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of a compassionate friend. Focus on acknowledging your pain, validating your experience, and offering kindness and understanding.

Why it works: This promotes self-compassion, which is linked to reduced shame and emotional distress.

Neff, K. D. (2003). *Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself*. Self and Identity, 2(2), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032

Self-Compassion Letter Writing Continued

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of a compassionate friend.

Experiential Exercises

Judgment Detox: Release the Beliefs That Hold You Back from Living a Better Life by Gabrielle Bernstein (2018)

🌟 Main Premise *Judgment Detox: Release the Beliefs That Hold You Back from Living a Better Life* by Gabrielle Bernstein (2018):

🌟 Main Premise

We all judge—ourselves, others, the world—and this judgment is a form of fear. It separates us from love, peace, and connection. Letting go of judgment is not about ignoring injustice or tolerating harm but about healing the pain and limiting beliefs inside ourselves that fuel judgment in the first place.

Bernstein offers a six-step process to detox from judgment and shift into love and forgiveness.

🖌️ The Six-Step Judgment Detox Process

1. **Witness Your Judgment Without Judgment**
   - **The first step is to become aware of your judgments without judging yourself for having them.**
   - **Notice your thoughts, your language, your feelings when you judge someone (or yourself).**

- **Awareness alone begins the process of healing.**

2. **Honor the Wound**
   - **Judgment is a projection of our own unhealed wounds.**
   - **Explore where your judgment comes from: childhood trauma, fear of inadequacy, shame, etc.**
   - **Bring compassion to your own pain.**
3. **Put Love on the Altar**
   - **Here you invite a willingness to heal.**
   - **Through prayer, intention, or meditation, ask your inner guide or a higher power for help in seeing things differently.**
4. **See for the First Time**
   - **Use specific tools to change your perspective:**
     - **EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique or "tapping") to release the emotional charge.**
     - **Visualization and affirmations.**

- **Begin to see the person or situation through the lens of love instead of fear.**

5. **Cut the Cords**
   - **Release the energetic attachment to the people or situations you judge.**
   - **Visualization and forgiveness work help you cut these unhealthy chords.**
   - **Forgiveness does not mean condoning; it means freeing yourself from resentment.**
6. **Bring Your Shadows to Light**
   - **Continue uncovering deeper layers of judgment.**
   - **Stay committed to the practice, recognizing that it's a lifelong process of spiritual growth.**
   - **The more light you shine on your shadows, the more free you become.**

💬 Key Takeaways:

- **Judgment is a habit we use to protect ourselves from pain, but it only creates more separation and suffering.**

- **Healing judgment means taking responsibility for our own healing.**
- **Love is the antidote to judgment.**
- **This process helps us feel lighter, more peaceful, more connected, and more compassionate.**

Happy for No Reason

The Blame, Shame

and Complain Game

HFNR Trainer Program

Blame-Shame-Complain-Game

Happy for No Reason

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There are two types of behaviors that we talk about in Happy for No Reason. One is victim behavior, and one is victor behavior. There are three main signs of being a victim, which are:

(1) blaming other people for your unhappiness or for what they're doing,

(2) shaming—which is blaming yourself, and

(3) complaining about everything. Any time you find yourself in those three behaviors, you know that you're also in victim behavior.

The Blame, Shame, and Complain Game is a way to bring awareness to any patterns of victim behavior that show up through blaming, shaming, or complaining.

For a week, any time that you (or anyone else playing the game) blames, shames, or complains, they have to put a dollar in the bowl. (Or you can choose any amount that people have to put into the bowl, like quarters.) You can invite your family members or co-workers to play with you, or you can do it with yourself. At the end of the week, you take all of the money in the bowl and donate it somewhere.

Imagery Rescripting

(for shame and guilt)

Purpose: Reprocesses painful memories by imagining alternative, empowering outcomes.

Instructions: Recall a painful memory involving shame or guilt. Now imagine the situation unfolding differently — with support, protection, or a kind response from a figure (real or imagined). Visualize yourself responding assertively or being nurtured.

Why it works: Helps change the emotional meaning of past experiences.

Arntz, A. (2012). Imagery rescripting as a therapeutic technique: Review of clinical trials, basic studies, and research agenda. *Journal of Experimental Psychopathology, 3*(2), 189–208. https://doi.org/10.5127/jep.024211

Guided Visualization:
Release to the River

Purpose: Let go of emotional pain symbolically.

Instructions:

- **Close your eyes and imagine a river.**
- **Place your shame, guilt, or emotional pain into a symbolic object (a stone, a leaf).**
- **See yourself placing it in the water and watching it float away.**
- **Repeat as needed.**

Escaping The Approval Seeking Trap

Here's an exercise you can do to start building the circuitry of self-validation and celebration. Do this anytime as you are ready to start practicing letting go:

1. When you act or speak in a way that makes you feel good about yourself, stop and acknowledge it.

2. Reward yourself with praise and joy.

3. You can tap your heart or do a little internal victory dance. The important thing is that you acknowledge yourself.

You can also do this any time you experience a "win" in your life. For example: getting a new job, doing an act of self-care, or working towards a creative goal. Take a moment to celebrate your win!

Self-acknowledgement helps us to shift from looking outside of ourselves for approval to validating ourselves instead.

When we're celebrating ourselves, we're supporting our brain chemistry to experience happiness, joy, and fulfillment in life. The more that we build these

circuits, the more that we can stay in an ongoing state of self-love.

You can start simply by celebrating yourself in small baby steps each day.

“Stop looking outside for scraps of pleasure or fulfillment for validation or security or love. You have a treasure within that is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer.” – Eckhart Tolle

The R.A.I.N. Technique
(Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Nurture)

Purpose: Mindfully addresses difficult emotions like guilt and shame.

Why it works: Increases emotional awareness and reduces avoidance and self-judgment.

Instructions:

- **Recognize what you're feeling (e.g., “This is shameful).**
- **Allow it to be there without pushing it away.**
- **Investigate the feeling with curiosity (Where is it in my body? What thoughts are here?).**
- **Nurture yourself with self-compassion.**

Brach, T. (2019). *Radical compassion: Learning to love yourself and your world with the practice of RAIN*. Viking.

HFNR 21 Happiness Habits
Letting Go

The 21 Happiness Habit Practices the Pillar of the Mind—Don't Believe Everything You Think
Go Beyond the Mind and Let Go
The Letting Go Process

Make yourself comfortable and focus inwardly. Your eyes may be open or closed.

Step 1: Focus on an issue that you would like to feel better about and then allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling in this moment. This doesn't have to be a strong feeling. In fact, if you are feeling numb, flat, cut off, or empty inside, those are feelings that can be let go of just as easily as the more recognizable ones. Just welcome the feeling and allow it to be as fully as you can.

This instruction may seem simplistic, but it needs to be. Most of us live in our thoughts, pictures, and stories about the past and the future, rather than being aware of how we actually feel in this moment.

The only time that we can actually do anything about the way we feel (and, for that matter, about our businesses or our lives) is NOW.

Step 2: Ask yourself: Could I let this feeling go?

This question is merely asking you if it is possible to take this action. "Yes" or "no" are both acceptable answers. You will often let go even if you say "no."

All the questions used in this process are deliberately simple. They are not important in and of themselves but are designed to point you to the experience of letting go.

Step 3: Ask yourself this simple question: Would I let this go? In other words: Am I willing to let go?

If the answer is "no," or if you are not sure, ask yourself: "Would I rather have this feeling, or would I rather be free?" Even if the answer is still "no," go on to Step 4.

Step 4: Ask yourself this simpler question: When?

This is an invitation to just let it go now. You may find yourself easily letting go. Remember that letting go is a decision you can make any time you choose.

Step 5: Repeat the preceding four steps as often as needed until you feel free of that particular feeling.

NOTE: You will probably find yourself letting go a little more at each step of the process. The results at first may be quite subtle, but if you are persistent, very quickly the results will get more and more noticeable. You may find that you have layers of feelings about a particular topic, so be patient. However, what you let go of is gone for good and you will feel lighter and more peaceful.

Emotional First Aid Kit

As you move through this course, take note of the concepts, tools and resources that resonate with you. Proactively put together your Mindfulness Toolbox or your Emotional First Aid Kit. This is where you will store the materials you want to refer to as you move forward and embrace freedom from regret, Shame, self-doubt, and judgment of self and others. You may also want to save strategies for making space for peace, grace, and love.

With this Emotional First Aid Kit, you will have touch stones that you can use as reminders of how to get yourself back on track if you faulter. These tools will help you remain grounded in your intention to live with ease.

Examples of Emotional First Aid Kits

- **Create a folder on your computer or smart device where you organize the tools that resonate with you.**
- **Start a journal where you keep track of the tools, write down your thoughts and feelings, and track your progress and successes (you can do this in the format of your choice such as a physical journal, or a written journal on your computer or smart device.**
- **A physical basket or box where you keep items that remind you to stay grounded or that you can touch and embrace their meaning.**
- **Post notes in prominent places around your home or workstation that you will see or read when you need reminders.**

Purpose: Build coping strategies when shame/pain arises.

Create a kit with:

- **A list of affirmations.**
- **A grounding object (stone, essential oil, soft cloth).**
- **A playlist of songs that soothe or uplift you.**
- **A list of people you can call or text for support.**
- **Breathing exercises or calming techniques.**
- **Centering Practices**