

JOURNALING TO EATING DISORDER RECOVERY GUIDE

PART 2

- dealing with negative emotions
- opposite action
- core beliefs & self esteem
- your values
- support
- commitment to your goals



Journaling to Recovery Workbook

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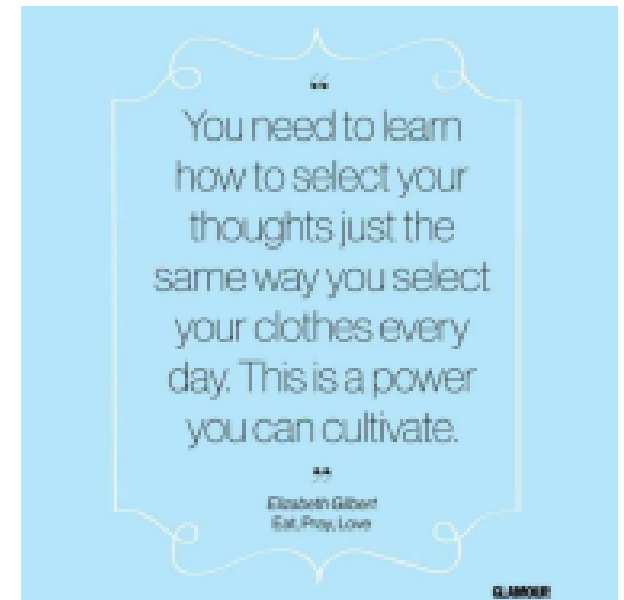
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CHAPTER 7: DEALING WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

How do you cope with negative emotions? Sometimes we have to experience some type of negative emotion - sadness, grief, anger, shock, etc. It's part of life—trying to avoid negative emotions is impossible and could even make those feelings worse when they inevitably happen. You learned in the chapter on managing your emotions about how to stay in a healthy emotional range and feel a sense of healthy control over how you're feeling. But sometimes, you're going to experience an overwhelming negative emotion and there's not much choice. How do you cope at the moment? How do you get through it?

Psychologist Marsha Linehan outlines different ways to deal with negative emotions:

- **Distraction:** This is where those grounding techniques you learned come in handy. It's not about avoiding your emotion, but about allowing yourself to gain distance from your emotions in the moment. You could distract with activities unrelated to your emotion, which fills your short-term memory and attention with other things: going to a coffee shop or seeing a movie, for example. You could distract yourself by trying to do something nice for someone else as a way to increase your positive feelings, but also to just get your mind off of yourself.
- **Self Soothing:** Think of your senses (hearing, touch, taste, smell, vision) and ways you could increase the positive comfort you experience. This obviously is a tricky one, as engaging your senses in a pleasurable way can sometimes lead to unhealthy, unwanted, or triggering behaviors (think: food, drugs, alcohol), but think of the healthy ways you can engage your senses. This might mean getting a hug, holding a partner's hand, finding a really comfortable place to sit, listening to good music, or enjoying a bit of your favorite food.



- Improving the moment: Sometimes getting through a negative emotion means replacing some of the negative with positive in the moment–this could be using mindfulness tools, pleasant imagery to imagine you are somewhere more pleasant, focusing on relaxation, or encouraging yourself with positive messaging.
- Radical Acceptance: Sometimes things are so uncomfortable or unpleasant that an important strategy is needed. “Radical acceptance” is letting go of fighting reality–it means fully accepting that you are experiencing pain and that you cannot change the situations that led you there. It means allowing yourself to feel the feelings without judgment or struggle and then focusing on how to help yourself feel better. It’s about accepting the moment and looking forward, rather than struggling with the “I shouldn’t feel this way” or “How did I get here?” Part of this concept stems from Buddhist teachings that suffering is when you struggle against your pain, and suffering is more painful than the pain itself.

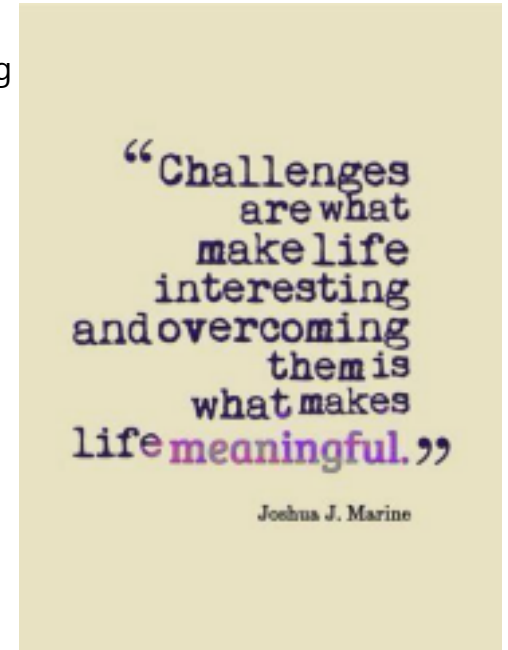
Journal Assignment: In what ways do you distract/cope in healthy ways already? Which suggestions resonate with you? Choose one or two and journal about your experience trying them out this week.

CHAPTER 8: OPPOSITE ACTION

Opposite Action is a technique to use when you're experiencing strong negative emotions. It works by doing exactly the opposite of whatever your emotion wants you to do. If you're feeling angry, you might want to yell at someone. Instead of yelling, though, the opposite action is to do something gentle and kind.

You can do this one anytime on your own—just identify what you're feeling and how it makes you want to behave. Then consider what the opposite of that behavior might look like. Once you know, give it a try.

But sometimes thinking of the opposite action when your emotions are high and your thoughts are racing feels impossible. If you journal some ideas now, it will be easier to implement them later.



Journal Assignment: Take some time to think about some common events that trigger your frustration, i.e. missed bus, partner failing to return a call/text promptly, or a bothersome co-worker. Write down some opposite action ideas to cope with them. Also, in addition to the opposite actions, include the healthy voice/positive affirmation behind that action. Put these ideas into action this week and journal about the impact on you and those around you.

CHAPTER 9: CORE BELIEFS & SELF-ESTEEM

Improving your self-esteem is imperative to your recovery process. We are often quite aware of how negatively we talk to ourselves, especially when we think we failed or made a mistake. But there are also thoughts and beliefs we have that are more underneath the surface or unconscious.

What core beliefs do you hold about yourself? Below are some examples of what negative ones sound like. You may not have experienced any of these directly, but here's what you can notice about them: they're black and white, universally applied, and absolute. They leave no room for flexibility or nuance.

Talk to yourself
like you would
to someone
you love.

Brené Brown

Unlovable Core Beliefs

"I'm unlovable", "I'm bound to be abandoned/rejected", "I'm defective, so others will not love me", "I don't deserve to be loved", "I am unwanted."

Worthless Core Beliefs

"I'm a failure", "I'm worthless", "I'm bad", "I am stupid", "I am crazy", "I don't deserve anything", "I am inferior."

Helpless Core Beliefs

"I'm incompetent", "I'm needy", "I'm weak", "I'm defective, I don't measure up."

About Others

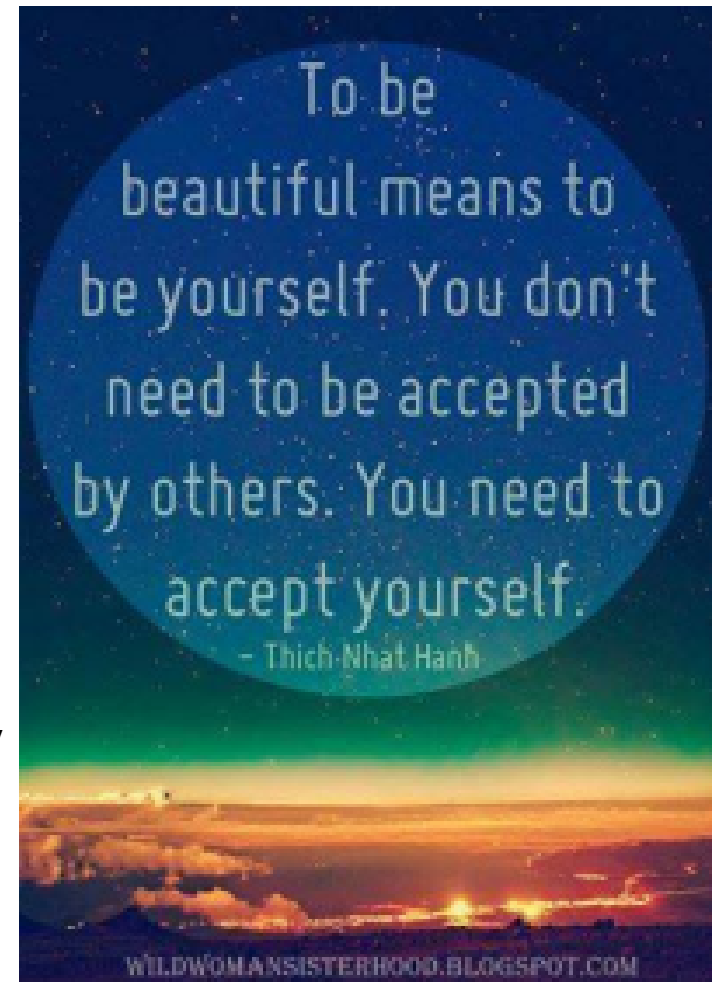
"You can't trust anyone", "Nobody likes me", "People can't change", "Everyone else is perfect."

About the World

"The world is a dangerous place", "Things will always turn out badly", "Nobody understands me."

Journal Assignment: Which of the above do you believe about yourself and the world around you? Can you identify how or why they came to be? What kind of impact do you think this makes on your relationships, career, and disordered eating? As funny as this may sound, in what ways have they helped you?

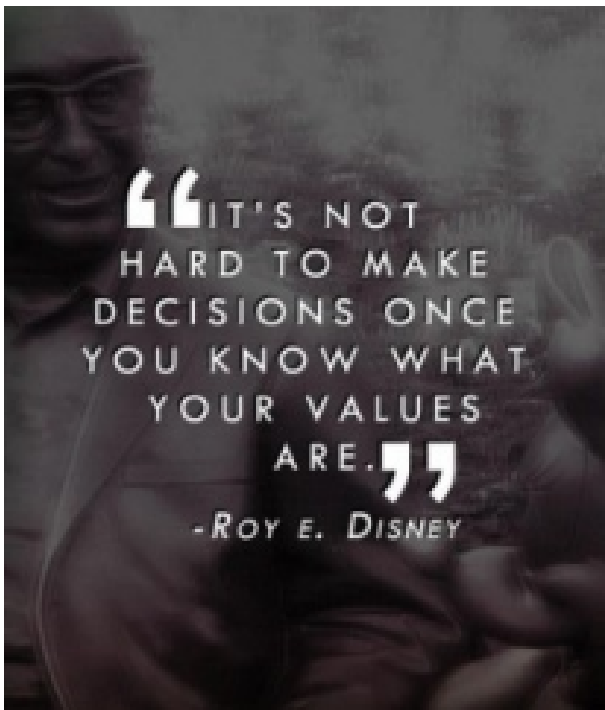
Also, where would you currently rate your self-esteem on a scale of 1-10? What would moving up a level or two look like for you? How would it feel and what would change as a result?



CHAPTER 10: YOUR VALUES

It can be easy to see how letting go of your disordered eating has many benefits. But it can be quite hard to let go of the identity that came with it. How has your relationship with food, your body, or exercise represented 'you' to others? We've focused a lot on what you stand to gain from recovery. But what will you lose? It is important to address this part of change and to grieve what you are letting go of or leaving behind.

A helpful way to begin thinking about your new identity is to get clear about what you value. Spending time thinking about your values will help you in future decision-making and bring about contentment and satisfaction in life that is authentic to you, not others' expectations or values.



Journal Assignment: What qualities do you appreciate in those you love and respect? How would your friends and family describe you? This week, reach out to at least 3 people and ask them to share what they appreciate, admire, or respect about you. Write about how this experience was for you, asking for this feedback and receiving the responses.

CHAPTER 11: SUPPORT

You need support from your family and friends. Everyone does. Asking for help from friends and family can improve your resilience and provide critical help for habit change. However, some people might feel embarrassed about talking to someone else about a problem or asking for help because it might be seen as a sign of weakness, or the person might think the problem is silly and unimportant.

Usually though, talking to someone about a problem and asking for help are active steps toward problem-solving, and can give you a new perspective and insight into the situation. Asking for help can move you closer to a solution and closer to resolving the feelings of stress and difficult emotions you are experiencing. Also, when you ask for help, you might strengthen the relationship with that person because they feel valued and trusted by you, making your relationship stronger, not weaker.

Some common fears around reaching out include:

- ❖ "I don't want to burden other people with my problems". The people who love you will love you no matter what's going on in your life. You are not a burden to them. It's true that your friends and family members are human, and they will have their limits when it comes to discussing things that are distressing. If you're worried about pushing their limits, try checking in with them before and after having difficult conversations.

A simple question like "Do you have 15 minutes to talk about this thing with me right now?" can go a long way toward helping your loved ones feel that their time and emotional energy are being respected. When people feel respected, they're more likely to listen and support you from a place of generosity rather than from one of obligation.



- ❖ "I don't want pity from others". There's a big difference between pity and support. Pity has to do with feeling sad for another person. Usually, it implies that one person looks down on another person for their misfortune.

Support is an action. Someone may feel sadness and compassion for you when they give you support, but they're not looking down on you. And they're certainly not leaving you to fend for yourself.

- ❖ "People will just think I'm weak". Asking for support takes strength. That's because it takes wisdom to know when you can't handle something on your own, and courage to allow another person to see your struggle. Besides, the alternative is to struggle through something on your own. You're not likely to be the best partner, child, parent, or friend when you're suffering alone. You're likely to be angry, have more mood swings, be more nervous and afraid, and be more concerned with your own issues. And none of your loved ones will appreciate that.
- ❖ "They might think that I can't solve my own problems". You probably can solve your own problems, or at least wait them out alone. But realistically, the best and most sustainable solutions come from many minds, not just one.
- ❖ "I'm an adult. I should be able to do this on my own". You probably can do it on your own. But the goal isn't just to survive your challenges. It's to get through them stronger and happier and to learn and grow from them. Advice from friends and family can give you perspectives you wouldn't otherwise have, and can help you learn lessons more quickly. That means less suffering for you and more personal growth in the long run.

Journal Assignment: Is this an area in your life that needs an overhaul or a few simple adjustments? If you could either confront or share with one person about your eating struggles, who would that be? Can you set a goal to tell them within the next few days?

If you aren't ready to share it, one step in that direction would be to write a letter/email you do not intend to send. If you are coming up against major resistance here, know that when we reach out to others for support, you are giving them an opportunity to feel needed and appreciated. This also creates the space for them to share something they have or are currently struggling with.

CHAPTER 12: COMMITMENT

You've made it! Now it's time to pause. Pause, reflect, and give yourself credit for making it this far in your recovery work. Reflect on this process; what have you discovered about yourself? What are some of your new coping tools and affirmations? Who have you added to your support system?

Know that there is no perfect/right/easy way on this path towards intuitive eating and making peace with your body. This may be the hardest work you will ever do in your life. Hopefully, the light at the end of the tunnel is shining a bit brighter than it was in Chapter 1. Lastly, don't forget your self-care. Be sure to make journaling, reading, and quiet alone time not just a priority, but a necessity!

Journal Assignment: Look back at your journal entry regarding your goals. What have you achieved and what do you still plan to work on? How do you want to remain committed to this journey? What additional goals would you like to achieve in the next 3, 6, or 12 months? How would you like to feel? Check out this site (www.futureme.org) to write yourself a letter that will be delivered to you at a future date. Thank yourself in advance for the hard work you will continue to do to heal your relationship with food and your body.

Continued Support

- ★ If you would like to read more about recovery, check out our [blog here](#).
- ★ Evolve now offers a self-paced online course with the option of one on one coaching. [Learn more here](#).
- ★ If you'd like to talk with us about working with an Evolve therapist or dietitian, you can [click here to contact us](#).

Testimonials for Evolve Wellness

"Shrein and her staff at Evolve are talented, knowledgeable, highly skilled, warm and relational. Being able to create a safe and professional therapeutic environment is deeply important - as those struggling with eating disorders (i.e. Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge-Eating Disorder, painful body image concerns) and disordered eating often carry shame and a fear of judgment. I have collaborated with the Evolve staff for many years now, and have personally witnessed many clients whose lives have completely changed as a result of their therapeutic engagement with the staff at Evolve. Shrein and the staff at Evolve Wellness Group make freedom from the chains of an eating disorder entirely possible!"

"I've had the pleasure of knowing Shrein and many of the clinicians at Evolve, a therapy group practice for well over a decade. I do not hesitate to refer folks to Evolve when they are in need of transformative healing. I highly recommend their services. The clinicians at Evolve are exceptional, possessing extensive training and experience in treating a wide range of eating disorders, including Binge Eating, Anorexia, Bulimia, ARFID, and more. Their expertise in this area is evident in their approach, which focuses on addressing the whole person - mind and body. What sets Evolve apart is their commitment to providing concrete tools and guidance to improve clients' lives in all areas. They go beyond traditional therapy by offering various options for support, including individual therapy, group counseling, nutrition counseling, coaching, and an online course. This comprehensive approach ensures that clients receive holistic and personalized care tailored to their specific needs."