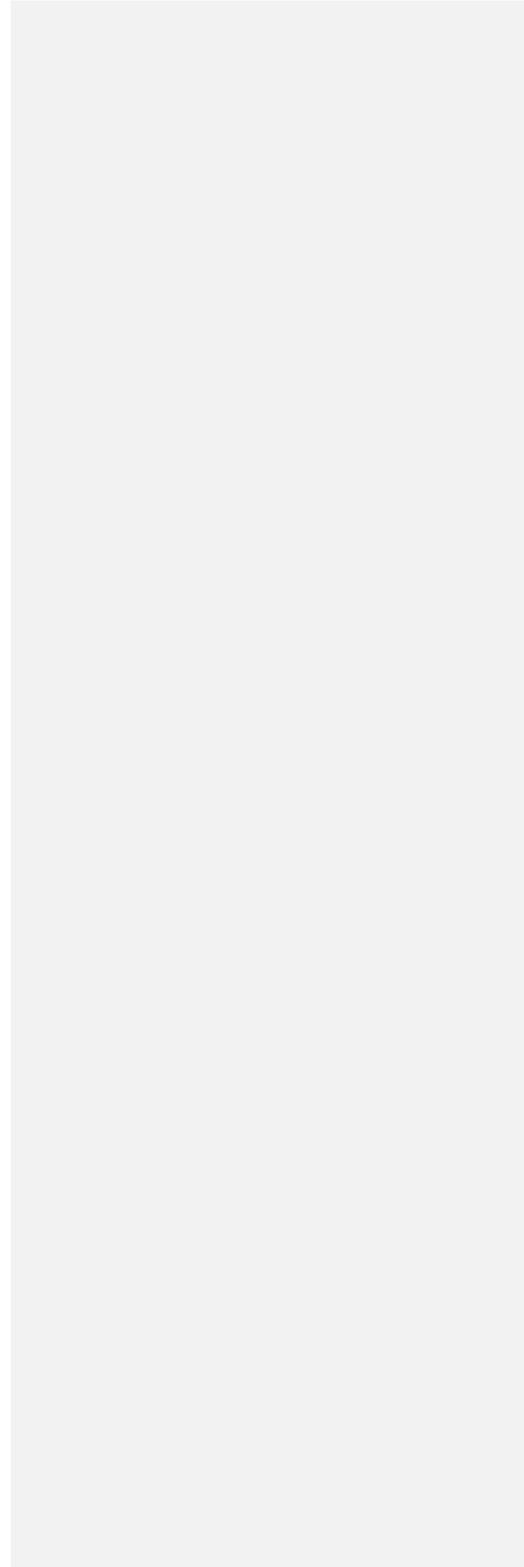


**Reclaiming What Was Lost**

A Woman's Guide to Healing Childhood Sexual Trauma Using Parts Work Therapy, Somatic  
Techniques, and Polyvagal Theory

Jenifer Freedy, MEd, RSW



## <toc>Table of Contents

### **Introduction**

#### **Part 1: Preparation and New Information**

Chapter 1: Understanding Childhood Sexual Abuse

Chapter 2: Developing Your Grounding and Pacing

Chapter 3: The Polyvagal Theory: A New Way to Understand Yourself After Childhood Sexual Trauma

Chapter 4: The Structural Dissociation Model of Trauma: Why Your Post-Trauma Reactions Make Sense

#### **Part 2: Your Parts, Their Roles, and Beginning to Connect**

Chapter 5: Your Protector Parts: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Submit, and Please See Me

Chapter 6: Your Engager Parts: The Adult Self and the Core Self

Chapter 7: Your Child Parts: The Wounded Children and the Waiting Children

#### **Part 3: Parts Work: Building Your Relationship and Synthesizing the Healing**

Chapter 8: Learning the Unique Language of the Traumatized Nervous System

Chapter 9: Pairing SIBAM with the ALOW Technique

Chapter 10: Putting It All Together

### **Conclusion**

## <cn>Introduction

When we talk about childhood sexual abuse (CSA), we recognize the pain, fear, confusion, and betrayal—and we marvel at the ways these can continue to echo for years or even decades later. This isn't terribly surprising. In fact, it makes complete ~~and-total~~ sense. Because CSA can change everything—including how your brain and nervous system function long ~~afterward~~[after abuse](#).

However, this is only half of the story. While your brain was being forced to rewire to get through it, the abuse was *also taking* something profound. You see, every child is born deeply lovable. You are inherently whole and naturally deserving. And coming to know this truth during childhood creates a vital foundation for a healthy adulthood. But this is something CSA can seriously erode—especially if you had nowhere else to turn. Therefore, getting through ~~this-such~~[such-of](#) trauma, especially during childhood, ~~is~~ really is nothing short of monumental... and so is the work you can now offer yourself as you begin to reclaim what was lost.

Formatted: Font: Italic

## <ah>The Double Wound of CSA

There's an experiment from the world of brain science ~~that-that's~~[has](#) always fascinated me. And it's one I routinely share with women working through CSA.

In this study, researchers Blakemore and Cooper (1970) wanted to explore if the brain has critical periods of learning—specific periods in neuro-development when certain experiences are needed to “wire up” certain abilities.

To explore this question, the team did something bold. They lovingly raised kittens in an environment with only vertical lines. Nothing horizontal—not on the walls, not on the furniture, not even in the architecture of the room. During that period of visual development, the only lines the kittens experienced were tall, thin, and vertical.

The results? When the experiment ended and the kittens were moved to a normal setting, their brains could register everything—except horizontal lines! The horizontal patterns were absolutely there; they were an undeniable part of the kittens’ outer world. But because their brains didn’t experience ~~horizontal~~horizontal lines during the critical period that matter, it was as if ~~horizontal~~these lines now didn’t exist at all. The kittens’ ability to see and experience this part of their reality was offline.

Why should research about kittens’ neuro-visual development matter to survivors of CSA? Because in a tragically beautiful way, this study mirrors something so many women know deep down: Growing up in a world where you must cope with abuse means you’ll *also* miss learning to see vital truths about yourself—truths that are needed throughout life, including:

- ~~<begin bulleted list>~~You always deserve to be safe and properly loved.
- Your body is sacred and always entitled to protection.
- You have a built-in worthiness simply because you exist.
- You have a unique core self that is real and always matters.~~<end bulleted list>~~

Childhood and adolescence are themselves critical periods. Just like kittens need exposure to horizontal lines to experience them later in life, all children need safe and consistent mirroring of their worth to learn to feel *this* as they grow (Ainsworth 1979; Bowlby 1988; Neufeld and Maté 2004; Perry and Szalavitz 2017; Schore 2012; Siegel and Bryson 2011).

Without this, a child’s sense of herself becomes limited and distorted. ~~Instead~~Instead of feeling worthy to belong, ~~be loved, and~~ safely seen and ~~known~~loved, she grows up feeling different, ~~bad,~~ and unsafe—like she’s living in a world made for others, ~~but~~ not her. Especially after sexual abuse.

**<ah>You Did Nothing Wrong**

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

If any of this resonates ~~with you~~, here's what I'd also like you to know: None of this was your fault—no matter what. You did nothing to make ~~the~~ abuse [and neglect](#) happen. And nothing that happened caused you to lose your inherent worthiness in any way. That is the truth. What you needed was not made available (or available enough) by the important people ~~around you~~ [guiding your life](#). You and your nervous system experienced both trauma and emotional neglect during that critical period of childhood, adolescence, or both. So, the struggles you may have had then, or now, make total and absolute sense.

There's one other crucial thing I'd like you to know (and this is really important even if you're still learning to believe it). What you missed during that critical period of life *is still possible for you*. It is still possible. Not only can your trauma be better processed, but those inherent truths about you and your worth are still there. And they're waiting for you to learn to reclaim them—even all these years later. In fact, reclaiming these essential truths is a vital part of healing, and something so many women still long for.

### **<ah>Respecting Your Parts That Helped You**

This book is not a critique of how you've engaged your life, either back then or now. It's not meant to pathologize you or make you feel like a victim. Instead, this book will help you better understand and even respect some important *parts* of yourself inside—parts with specific brain and body functioning that helped you to cope with the trauma and neglect (Anderson 2021; Fisher 2017; van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 2006; Schwartz 2021). In fact, these parts inside—sometimes called ego states (Watkins and Watkins 1997)—may have helped you a lot more than you know. They may have helped you by staying quiet and hidden; alert and on guard; submitting or numb; needful and dependent; critical and controlling; avoidant and checked out, or even frozen and dissociated—coping strategies needed during childhood sexual trauma. These

were the best (and sometimes only) options you had to manage ~~to~~ the abuse and lack of proper support. ~~—especially~~ during ~~a~~ ~~that~~ ~~very~~ ~~=~~ vulnerable time of life. That counts for everything!

These parts of you did great.

The problem is, they might still be showing up in ~~the~~ similar ways even though the abuse ~~is now~~ ~~is~~ ~~now~~ over.

### <ah>Mislabeling Old Self-Protection Reactions

Too often survivors of CSA carry deep or toxic forms of shame—not just about the trauma they endured, but also about how they responded to it. Even as adults, many women are confused by, or even angry at, the protective mechanisms that activated to ~~cope~~ help them. And no wonder. These protection reactions and their different coping mechanisms are sometimes mislabeled “symptoms,” “disorders,” or “problem behaviors.” Yet, in reality, they were only ever normal responses to incredibly overwhelming childhood experiences (Fisher 2021; Maté and Maté 2022; Schwartz 2021).

This book is about helping you see yourself, and these parts inside of you, differently—not as symptoms of a disorder to be fixed, but as dutiful helpers that got you through it. And even if it’s been years or decades since the abuse, these parts of you can still be tended to.

At the same time, this book will help you ~~learn how to~~ connect with other important parts of you too—parts that never got to come forward ~~and grow into your life~~ to offer you ~~but offer~~ the things you need for healthy living: greater balance, comfortable presence, safer connection, and healthy control. These parts inside may not have developed because other parts of ~~yourself~~ you ~~had were busy~~ ~~to~~ coping ~~e~~ with abuse.

### <ah>Feeling That There's More

Maybe exploring your trauma is pretty new, or maybe you've done some healing work in the past—like journaling, self-help books and [informative](#) podcasts, or a little (or a lot) of different therapies. But if you're reading this book, you might still be relying on old ways of coping that you logically know aren't healthy—distrusting others in your life even though ~~you knew~~ they're good people; avoiding things that you know you should ~~explore~~ more fully [explore](#); repeating unhealthy patterns that negatively impact your life; or still feeling stuck even though you've worked on these issues.

If any of these resonate, they are not signs of brokenness. In fact, as you'll learn, they really make sense. CSA doesn't just affect our thoughts and behaviors. It also creates physiological (body), neurological (brain), and developmental (sense of self) impacts. So, repeating old patterns might simply mean that the trauma still affects you on *these* particular levels. Therefore, you might be seeking more than [new](#) insights, ~~or~~ conscious behavior change, or different coping strategies (although there will be some of this here for you too). Maybe you're wondering if there's still something more—something that ~~works~~ [helps](#) on these levels ~~as well~~ [too](#).

### <ah>From Coping to Reclaiming

Again, CSA is really about two things: what happened (the trauma you endured and the lack of proper support during and afterward) and the personal growth you didn't get to experience (being properly shown who you truly ~~are~~ [are inside](#) beyond trauma and coping).

As such, here's the next question almost every woman asks: How do we begin (or continue) to heal this now? The answer: By pairing specific grounding and pacing practices with *three* important trauma frameworks.

## <bh>The Polyvagal Theory

Over the last decade, the polyvagal theory (PVT) has helped us better understand trauma—and more effective ways to heal it (Porges 2011; Dana 2018). The PVT and its science ~~shows~~ shows us two important things ~~us some important insights about childhood trauma~~: how trauma changes our brain and nervous system functioning especially during childhood, and how our survival reactions during the trauma can continue to echo years ~~or decades~~ later. It highlights what can get stuck after trauma, and the particular methods needed to heal this.

## <bh>The Structural Dissociation Model of Childhood Trauma

The structural dissociation model (SDM) is a fancy name for a simple but powerful trauma framework: When a child endures sexual abuse—while also missing proper support—her brain and nervous system must significantly alter to cope with trauma’s aftermath (Fisher 2017; Maté and Maté 2022; Porges 2011; Schore 2003; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014). In other words, her brain and nervous system can now over-activate something called protector parts—defensive parts of herself inside with ~~specific~~ their own nervous system ~~activity~~ activity (Anderson 2021; Fisher 2017; van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 2006; Schwartz 2021). Although we all have these vital parts of self, after CSA they can become an issue.

Because childhood is a time of complex brain development, an overuse of protection responses can begin to imprint. As the child’s nervous system becomes preoccupied with danger, her protector parts and their behaviors remain highly activated (Fisher 2017; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Schwartz 2021). Self-protection becomes her default response, while the growth of her regulated parts is overshadowed (Fisher 2017; Schwartz 2021). Ultimately, the child develops a *personality of overprotection* with a limited repertoire of other responses to life. This

is why the SDM and parts work therapy matter—they work with ~~these~~[the](#) parts of self still lost in abuse.

There are three different categories of self-parts we'll be working with throughout this book:

- *Protector parts* that activate defensive responses to cope, reduce harm, and [help us](#) survive
- *Child parts* that feel raw, scared, hurt, and overwhelmed, while also holding our unmet needs, wishes, and hopes
- *Adult and core parts* that help us experience life with healthier balance and skills, wisdom and insight, safe love and connection, and a sense of purpose and meaning

### **Somatic Processes and Techniques**

While many good therapies work with thoughts and behaviors, after trauma, somatic (body-based) methods are *also* needed for healing (Fisher 2017; Maté and Maté 2022; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Levine 1997, 2010; van der Kolk 2014). ~~That's because~~[That's because](#) somatic interventions help the nervous system *remobilize*—a vital process to release [old and stuck](#) trauma energy (and chemistry) still activating in the nervous system (Levine 1997 2010; Ogden and Fisher 2015). These somatic approaches work with ~~traumatized nervous systems~~[trauma responses](#) in a way ~~other therapies often cannot~~.

In this book, we'll focus on a somatic technique I call SIBAM-ALLOW. Although this acronym is new to many women, its process is powerful at remobilizing (even long-held) stuck trauma.

## <ah>How to Use This Book

The approaches, tools, and techniques in this book are about reclaiming your mobility and truer self. And we do this in a way that feels right for you, with a timing that fits for your nervous system.

With all this in mind, if there are any sections or exercises in this book that feel overwhelming or triggering, you are welcome to skip them, return to them later, or refer to the publisher's website at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132> for supportive additions.

Allow me to say...

<begin unnumbered list>I am glad you are here.

We will do this together.

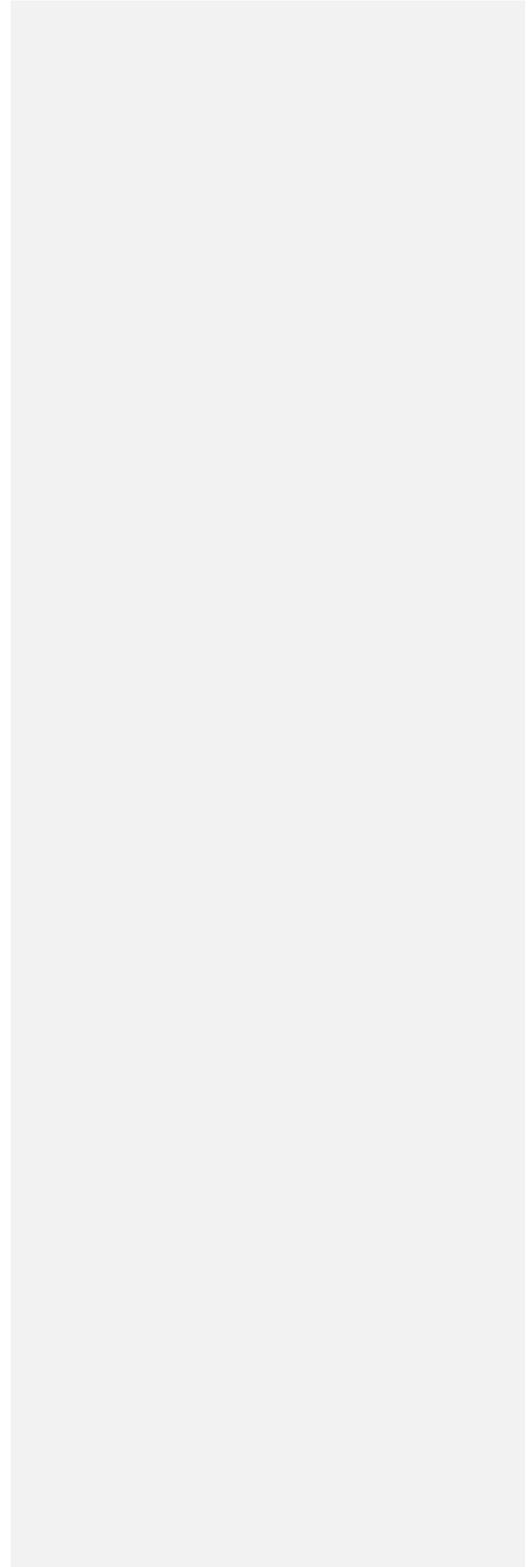
I welcome you to this journey...<end unnumbered list>

**Commented [JS1]:** What is this :)?

**Commented [JW2R1]:** lol, it's coding for the design team. It tells them to group these three lines together in a list so they clearly belong in the same paragraph with "Allow me to say" but are distinct as a unit.

**<pn>Part 1**

**<pt>Preparation and New Information**



## <cn>Chapter 1

### <ct>Understanding Childhood Sexual Abuse

If you've endured CSA, it can feel like a scar that never fades. You might struggle with memories, difficult emotions, or a sense of yourself that still feels confusing or fragile. Although tough, these struggles are very normal responses to something that never should have happened to you. CSA doesn't just take away your safety—it can reshape how you experience yourself and the world.

This chapter will help you to better understand CSA, normalize its ~~af~~fects, and highlight what might still need healing. (Please take your time with this information. In fact, if this feels like a lot, you're welcome to skip this chapter altogether or until a time that feels more comfortable to you.)

#### <ah>What Is CSA?

CSA happens when someone breaches your boundaries in a sexualized way while you're still a child or teenager—infancy to age eighteen years (Courtois 2010; Finkelhor 2009; Herman 1992; van der Kolk 2014). CSA isn't only about physical acts. It's any behavior that makes you feel unsafe, used, or a little or a lot uncomfortable. CSA always involves a power imbalance—whether through age, size, authority, or emotional influence. The sexual behavior is never mutual; it is imposed on the child for the gratification of the abuser (Briere and Elliott 2003; Kellogg 2009). And it always carries layers of secrecy and threats, manipulation, or exploitation—whether subtle or overt.

A key thing to understand is that CSA is never the child's fault. Never. The responsibility always lies with the abuser—even if they ~~are~~ were (or ~~were~~ are) known to you, related to you, or you care(d) about each other in some way.

Sexual abuse can happen in different ways. Some children endure more than one kind of abuse, ~~while~~ others might not recognize their ~~sexual~~ abuse, ~~believing it must~~ ~~because it didn't~~ involve ~~intense~~ physical contact. Because there can be confusion about this, let's explore different types of CSA.

### **<bh>Physical Sexual Abuse**

CSA and incest can involve physical contact that can leave deep marks—~~not only~~ ~~on~~ the body, ~~but~~ ~~also~~ on the mind and nervous system. This can include:

**Touching or fondling.** An abuser might touch a child's private areas like her genitals or breasts, either over or under her clothing. Sometimes, the child is also pressured to hold or touch the abuser. This could also involve touching nonsexual parts of the body in ways that feel uncomfortable or inappropriate.

**Forcing or pressuring a child into sexual acts.** This can involve making the child watch or participate in removing clothing, dressing inappropriately, or moving the body in sexualized ways. It could also include unwanted kissing, sexual fondling, or explicit acts like oral sex.

**Penetration.** This can include any vaginal, anal, or oral penetration, whether with fingers, objects, or genitals.

**Rape and Date Rape.** Sexual assault and rape occur through force, strong coercion, or incapacitating methods (drugs, alcohol, or date rape drugs) where consent is not explicitly offered or legal.

### **<bh>Psychological Sexual Abuse and Emotional Incest**

Psychological sexual abuse or incest may not involve physical touch, ~~but~~ ~~But~~ it can create deep confusion, fear, ~~and~~ betrayal, and ~~cause~~ lasting harm to a child or teenager (Briere

and Elliott 1994 2003; Courtois 2010; Finkelhor 2009; Herman 1992). Here, sexually-based behaviors become gradually normalized, grooming the child for further or more intense acts. This kind of abuse creates deep vulnerability in the child while breaking down her sense of safe and healthy boundaries. This can include:

**Exposure to pornography.** An abuser shows the child sexual videos or nude images of ~~themselves~~ [himself](#) or others, often claiming it is for education or entertainment.

**Sexualized conversations.** The abuser might bring up sexual topics that are inappropriate, ask intrusive questions about the child's body, or use sexual language to see how the child reacts. The abuser may talk about his own sexual experiences, or those of others including people the child knows.

**Forcing a child to watch sexual acts.** An abuser might expose a child to live or recorded sexual activity, sometimes including their own actions, or images of other adults, children, or people the child knows.

### **<del>Sexual Exploitation**

Sexual exploitation happens when someone uses their power, control, or subtle or overt manipulation to take advantage of a child. ~~This can be~~ for sexual purposes, or to create some gain for themselves or others (Briere and Elliott 1994, 2003; Herman 1992). This increases ~~the~~ [a](#) child's vulnerability and can eventually create dependency on the abuser. This can include:

**Recording acts of abuse.** An abuser might force a child to participate in sexual acts that are photographed or videotaped. These recordings are then shared or distributed, adding another ~~serious~~ layer of harm and exploitation.

**Exchanging sexual acts for goods or privileges.** An abuser might manipulate a child into performing sexual acts in exchange for things like food, clothing, money, shelter, or needed

emotional attention.

**Child trafficking.** A child might be isolated and exploited for sexual purposes, often under the pretense of an adventure or job opportunity. This is usually paired with physical and psychological manipulation, coercion, and violence, making it hard for the child to escape.

**Ritualized sexual abuse within cults or groups.** Some groups or cults use sexual abuse of children (and their adults) as initiation for membership. Sexual abuse is used to strip boundaries or power from members, while claiming the abuse will bring belonging, deeper connection, or spiritual enlightenment (Noblitt and Noblitt 2014; Lalich and Tobias 1994). This form of CSA can also be paired with physical and psychological abuse that is “demanded by a higher power.” These experiences leave the child, and often the her adults around her, deeply confused, afraid, and unable to separate truth from calculated lies and manipulation (Herman 1992; Lalich and Tobias 1994; Salter 2012; Scott 2001).

#### <ah>Childhood vs. Adult Sexual Trauma

Sexual abuse is especially harmful during the critical period of childhood and adolescence. That’s because it takes advantage of a child’s natural immaturity, vulnerability, and trust in authority (Briere 2006; Courtois 2010; Freyd 1996, 1999; Herman 1992; Schore 2003, 2012). Childhood is that critical period when we learn healthy love, protection, emotional safety and care, and safety—based on how our important people treat us. Children look to their adults and older peers for steady protection, respect, and proper guidance. So, when a child’s trust is betrayed through sexual abuse, it can turn her development sideways upside down. This kind of betrayal impacts her developing nervous system, causing important harm in lasting ways (Herman 1992; Fisher 2017; Schore 2003; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014).

## <ah>Impacts of Childhood Sexual Abuse

If you've experienced CSA, you might notice ~~both the~~ [its](#) overt and subtle impacts ~~it's~~ ~~had~~ on your psychological growth. Some common and very understandable struggles can include:

**Difficulty managing emotions and reactions.** Navigating life can start to feel ~~frequently~~ [routinely](#) overwhelming both during and after sexual abuse. Because CSA ~~impacts~~ [affects](#) emotional regulation ~~development~~, feeling balanced, self-trust, ~~or~~ [and](#) healthy control can ~~become~~ [be](#) difficult. Even typical daily ~~tasks~~ [activities](#) can trigger anxiety, frustration, avoidance, or disconnection.

**Challenges with trust and boundaries.** CSA can make it really difficult to trust or build healthy relationships with others—or even yourself. You might feel unsure about what behaviors are appropriate or what boundaries [you get](#) to set with others. You might also wonder if there are [actually](#) good people capable of safe and proper love. As a result, commitment issues, frequent insecurity or conflict, or codependent patterns can begin to develop.

**Struggling to fully understand and articulate the abuse.** [Because CSA can affect how memories are stored in the brain, abuse experiences can encode as fragments without context. Therefore, you might experience only pieces of a memory that feel random, disconnected, or deeply confusing.](#) ~~Because the abuse happened while your brain was developing, these memories may have encoded as fragments instead of fully remembered narratives with greater context. This can lead to reexperiencing only pieces of the abuse that feel disconnected or random~~ (Fisher 2017; Lanius et al. 2015; Levine 2010; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014). This ~~might~~ [can](#) include ~~felt~~ body memories, [visual flashes](#), or unexplained ~~body~~ sensations, ~~overpowering or random emotions, second-guessing~~ [Here, you might start second-guessing your memories, worrying you](#)

your memory or worrying you “just made it all up the abuse up.” This can cause you to minimize its the impact, trauma or begin to blameing yourself for what happened for the abuse (Briere 2006; Courtois 2010; Engel 2006; Freyd 1996, 1999; Lanius, Paulsen, and Corrigan 2014).

**Feelings of shame and self-doubt.** Even when you logically know the abuse wasn't your fault, a sense of deep shame can still feel deeply embedded. Because CSA happens when your personality is still is forming, the the shame during the abuse resulting shame -can start to come feel to feel like an like an identity (Briere 2006; Courtois 2010; Fisher 2017; Herman 1992). This can manifest as feeling bad, dirty, or or defective, or with feelings of chronic emptiness, unworthiness, or even irrational or -self-loathing. This is referred to as called toxic shame—a form of shame of shame that says “I am bad” instead of the more accurate of the more accurate “Something bad happened to me” (Bradshaw 1988; Courtois 2010; Engel 2002; Fisher 2017; van der Kolk 2014).

**Difficulty getting beyond survival mode.** CSA can force a child's nervous system into always expecting abuse and danger. As this embeds into the child's way of being, her adulthood can involve difficulty relaxing, limited curiosity, a lot of distrust, or discomfort spending time with others or even being alone. Experiencing even small joys can feel unfamiliar, wrong, or impossible. It can also create while a need for excitement or chaos, impulsive behaviors, or issues maintaining healthy relationships can develop.

**Feeling isolated and alone.** The intense secrecy surrounding CSA is designed to make the child feel isolated and helpless (Carnes 1997; Herman 1992; van der Kolk 2014). As an adult, feeling powerless, deeply lonely, or overly private, silent, different than others, or private vigilant are can become common a way of life.

Formatted: Font: Not Bold

**Confusion over how your brain and body responded.** CSA ~~is not~~ isn't just what's done to the child—it's also about what she had to do to get through it. Children are not equipped to fight back or escape easily. So, to cope, young nervous systems often rely on intense forms of self-protection: submitting, complying, freezing, or shutting down. These are not choices; they are *automatic (nervous system) reactions* beyond a child's conscious control (Fisher 2017; Herman 1992; Levine 2010; Porges 2011; van der Kolk 2014). But without this understanding, survivors may believe that the abuse was something they somehow allowed. This confusion can deepen when sexual sensation or wanted or needed attention ~~bring~~ ~~bring moments of comfort or~~ pleasure ~~during abuse~~. Although these reactions are ~~natural-normal~~ and common, they can really confuse the child, ~~or~~ and normalize ~~normalize~~ the abuse.

Although CSA is always complex, here is the truth for every child: ~~is~~ Even if it "didn't feel that bad," even if you froze or submitted, even if there were moments when it felt okay or even "good," this does not change what is widely accepted: You were a child. You were too young to consent. Childhood is never meant to be sexualized. Period.

#### **<begin text box>A Word About Sexual Contact with Other Children**

Women sometimes have questions about their childhood sexual experiences with other children. These women ask about the difference between normal childhood sexual play versus CSA by another child. While this topic is beyond the scope of this book, it ~~is important~~ can help to know some important facts: Sexual exploration between children of similar ages is a common and normal part of development (Gil and Johnson 1993; Johnson 2010). However, sexual behaviours involving fear, confusion, coercion, or significant age difference can be indicators of abuse (Courtois 2010; Friedrich 2007, Shaw 2000). ~~Here,~~ CSA is also valid when true consent or general play is not a part of this e exploration. If you have questions about these types of

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

experiences, it's important (and okay) to bring these to a qualified professional ~~to explore safely, patiently, and without judgment.~~ <end text box>

### <ah>CSA: Why You?

Most abusers don't randomly or suddenly hurt children. It is much more intentional, planned, and calculated (Bennett, O'Donohue, and Linthicum 2014; Elliott, Beech, and Grubin 2010).

It is vital to understand that you didn't choose the abuse. You also didn't create the conditions for it to happen or continue. ~~And, you didn't permit it to continue~~. No child does. Although it's natural to want to feel in control of hard things—or even protect a person you thought cared about you—CSA is very complex and always the responsibility of the abuser.

### <bh>Grooming

The Grooming process is a critical part of sexually abusing a child. It's how abusers slowly break down the child by building trust, ~~test boundaries, manipulate the child, and slowly break her down~~ and eroding boundaries—all while keeping the abuse ~~hidden, and normalizing~~ normalized and hidden to the child (Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist 2006). Although often subtle, the grooming process is strategic, systematic, and always very deliberate. It's a method that exploits a child's natural vulnerability, making resistance very difficult ~~and~~ or even impossible (Courtois 2010; Herman 1992; Finkelhor 1984; Salter 2003).

The process of grooming, and its many forms of manipulation, are subtle but ~~very~~ incredibly potent ~~over a child~~. This is especially true when the abuse is concealed in “love,” “fun and games,” “deep friendship,” or “something unique and special.”

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Here's how ~~this~~ the grooming process can look (Bennett, O'Donohue, and Linthicum 2014; Elliott, Beech, and Grubin 2010; Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist 2006):

**Choosing you.** Abusers target children they see as vulnerable. Vulnerability doesn't mean weakness—it means the child may be more introverted, trusting, compliant, accessible, or without attentive parents. Abusers look for opportunities to gain a child's loyalty and then ensure the abuse stays hidden. This is never the fault of the child. It is all about opportunity for the abuser.

**Building trust.** Abusers know they can't immediately harm a child—they need to break down her natural defenses first. Initially, the abuser can seem ~~quite~~ innocent, kind, caring, ~~or~~ and even quite protective. ~~Even though~~ Although this behavior is ~~not~~ never genuine, it can feel this way and gains the child's trust.

**Fulfilling needs.** The abuser focuses on meeting the ~~needs of the child~~ child's need to solidify a compelling hold over her. This can include affection, special attention, favoritism, gifts, or some form of help or rescue she needs. The abuser might even step in as a caretaking figure when the child feels neglected, lost, or alone.

**Isolation.** Over time, the abuser works hard to create distance between the child and the people who could help and protect her—parents, siblings, friends, or teachers. Abusers accomplish this through physical isolation and creating a lot of alone time together. This can also can involve emotional isolation, ~~making the child feel~~ so the child feels understood ~~unseen or misunderstood~~ by ~~all~~ only ~~others except~~ the abuser.

**Blurring boundaries.** Abusers ~~make sure~~ ensure they cross sexual boundaries slowly to make their behavior seem natural and normal. This can begin with actions that seem innocent: shoulder squeezes, gentle massages, images of partially clothed bodies, or even some light drug or alcohol

use. Once normalized, these acts ~~then~~ gradually ~~then~~ escalate, making it hard for the child to see them as abnormal.

**Maintaining control.** Once more intense sexual abuse begins, abusers work hard to keep it a secret. They use both subtle and overt ~~types-forms~~ of fear, guilt, and threats to silence the child or her concerns. Abusers can make the child feel complicit in the abuse, convincing her harsh consequences could apply to her too. And although ~~abuse is~~ *never* a child's responsibility, this ~~argument~~ can feel powerful if other children were involved (Finkelhor 1984; Freyd 1996, 1999). Abusers are ~~also~~ skilled at threatening ~~consequences and losses that are~~ meaningful ~~losses: to the child: losing~~ the abuser's "special love," someone to really care for ~~her~~ ~~the child~~, her reputation and innocence, or even her or her loved ones' safety.

These are very powerful weapons over a now-confused child, who is still in a developmental stage of innocence. This is why CSA is far too common, and a story so many women (often unknowingly) share.

#### <begin exercise><ex>Naming Common Misbeliefs

Many women who endured CSA still carry beliefs from ~~past sexual abuse~~ ~~the abuse~~. ~~These~~ ~~Although the~~ beliefs can still feel ~~deeply~~ ingrained ~~even when they logically knowing~~ otherwise. ~~However, simply~~ recognizing ~~that these beliefs are still active can be an~~ ~~important~~ ~~them is a~~ step toward healing.

Below is a checklist of common beliefs many women still carry about past CSA.  
As you read through it, check any statements that feel (even slightly) true—  
even if you *logically* know that they are not accurate. Below is a checklist of common beliefs  
many women still carry about past CSA.

Formatted: Font: Italic

As you go through the list, you can check those that feel (even a little) still active, even if you logically know they're not accurate:

<begin unnumbered list>[[Insert short blank line]] The abuse was somehow partially or fully my fault.

[[Insert short blank line]] I should have stopped it. I had that power.

[[Insert short blank line]] I eventually knew it was wrong, but I still didn't stop it or tell. So, I can't be a victim.

[[Insert short blank line]] I didn't fight back, so I must have wanted it.

[[Insert short blank line]] It wasn't real abuse because it didn't involve physical contact.

Others had it worse than I did.

[[Insert short blank line]] I was too old to be a victim—I should have known better.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'm damaged because of what happened to me. I'm forever broken.

[[Insert short blank line]] If I tell anyone, they'll think I'm lying or exaggerating.

[[Insert short blank line]] If I tell anyone, they'll just pity me, and I hate pity.

[[Insert short blank line]] I should have healed by now. Others I know seem over it, so why aren't I?

[[Insert short blank line]] People will see me differently if they know the truth.

[[Insert short blank line]] I liked the attention sometimes. Maybe I wanted this to happen. Maybe he felt that too.

[[Insert short blank line]] If you love the abuser, and it felt special, it's not really abuse.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'd be responsible for total chaos in my family if anyone found out. I have to keep the secret, even now.

[[Insert short blank line]] I must have been a weak kid for being chosen. That kind of makes it

my fault.

[[Insert short blank line]] I still care about the abuser. It's been a long time. I should leave it alone.

[[Insert short blank line]] Facing it will make things worse, not better.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'll hurt my parents or others in my life if I tell. I don't want to be responsible for that.

[[Insert short blank line]] He was a troubled guy, so it's not like he meant to abuse me.

[[Insert short blank line]] No one can ever truly love me if they know what I went through.

[[Insert short blank line]] I was a difficult kid, so I deserved what I got.

[[Insert short blank line]] If I let myself cry or feel angry, I'll lose all control and mess up my life.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'm too sensitive. I'm overreacting to what happened.

[[Insert short blank line]] If the abuser was genuinely kind sometimes, it can't be true abuse.

[[Insert short blank line]] I don't always feel bad about it, so it couldn't have been that impactful.

[[Insert short blank line]] Opening this up will change my life completely. I'll have to go all in on the healing.

[[Insert short blank line]] I have to protect the abuser because people in my life still have a relationship with him.

[[Insert short blank line]] I participated when others were being abused, so I can't be a victim.

What if I'm actually an abuser?

[[Insert short blank line]] It only happened a few times, so it wasn't really that bad.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'll have to disclose this to everyone in my life.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'll have to confront my abuser.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'll have to talk about every incident in detail to heal.

[[Insert short blank line]] This was the way he showed love for me. He was too nice to have meant to abuse me.

[[Insert short blank line]] I was such a lonely kid. In a way, he was there for me. This can't be true abuse.

[[Insert short blank line]] People will blame me because I didn't tell.<end unnumbered list>

**Journal prompt:** As you think about all the ~~different~~ ways children are groomed for CSA, pause and take a moment to reflect. Do any of those grooming techniques ~~still help~~ keep your beliefs active? ~~It's okay if they do—that's really common, even well into adulthood.~~ Are there any beliefs that still feel especially active/potent? If so, that's okay—that's actually really common. even if you're well into adulthood. ~~How~~ However, how might ~~they~~ these be holding you back ~~in~~ your life now—either in clear or subtle ways?<end exercise>

Formatted: Font: Italic

### <bh>Trauma Bonding

As we discussed above, grooming is a deliberate and manipulative tactic used by all sexual abusers to manipulate a child. Grooming is designed to gain the trust of the child, and sometimes even the ~~child's~~ adults in her life. It's a powerful strategy that creates a false sense of caring under the guise of a ~~unique and caring/supportive special~~ relationship. It makes sense that CSA can feel so confusing—because how can ~~a~~ such a seemingly “kind person” be capable of ~~such~~ such calculation? Plus, they ~~Abusers~~ don't look or sound like the “monsters” we expect. ~~It's~~. It's what exactly what makes the grooming ~~so effective~~ process so powerful—and why it can , ~~and why it can~~ lead to something called *trauma bonding*.

Commented [JW3]: AQ: "caring" used earlier in the sentence

Trauma bonding happens when an abuser switches between harming you and then

showing you care (Carnes 1997). This switching creates a complex attachment causing the child to feel more in control than she is (Carnes 1997; Freyd 1996, 1999; Herman 1992). ~~Here, the~~ The child ~~begins to~~ comes to feel like a participant in the abuse, believing she has choices—although she does not.

The formation of a trauma bond is *never* the fault of the child. But this type of bonding can become very potent—~~and it it~~ can tie women to the abuser (~~or the~~ abuse) even years later (Carnes 1997; Fisher 2017; Herman 1992, 2015; van der Kolk 2014).

If any of this resonates, ~~here's what's~~ it's important to know: Trauma bonding is a survival mechanism—it helped your mind feel in control through a sense of connection (Briere 2006; Carnes 1997; Herman 2006; Freyd 1999). It says nothing about your character or strength, at all! You were doing the best you could to cope and get through—and your nervous system helped you by trauma bonding.

### <ah>Why It's Hard to Speak Up

As you can see, children face *a lot* of barriers when it comes to disclosing sexual abuse: their youth and lack of development; limited knowledge of abuse dynamics; powerful and complex grooming tactics; ongoing (overt or very subtle) threats and manipulations; trauma bonding; the resulting fear, shame, and deep confusion ~~this-all~~ of this creates; a potential lack of good supports; additional complicating life factors; and even the ~~needed~~ attention and special feelings the abuse may have offered. CSA can be far more complex than just seeing it coming or telling someone as soon as it happens (Herman 1997; Fisher 2017). And although this can be an uncomfortable truth, it really is all beyond the child's control.

Finally, although our understanding of CSA has developed, our culture doesn't make it

easy for survivors to come forward. Fear of stigma, still knowing the abuser, denial of abuse, faulty beliefs, and a lack of good ~~resources or~~ supports can ~~make woman~~ compel many women ~~to still~~ go it alone.

### <begin exercise><ex>Considering CSA Truths

Earlier in the chapter, we explored some common misbeliefs that many women still hold about their abuse. But with this new information—and ~~perhaps maybe~~ a growing understanding—you might consider ~~some of these~~ important truths at this stage. Some of ~~these~~ the following statements ~~may might~~ be easier to accept, while others ~~may may still~~ feel tough to reach ~~just now~~. That's okay. Healing really is a process so—~~and~~ there's no right or wrong way to engage ~~in~~ this exercise.

For each statement below, rate how much you can feel it on a scale of 1 to 5:

- 1 = Not at all true for me right now
- 2 = I feel curious about this belief
- 3 = I feel some truth about this belief for myself
- 4 = It feels mostly true about me at this stage
- 5 = It feel completely true for me now

Take your time, and remember, this exercise is about noticing where you are in your healing journey. Try to avoid any self-judgment or self-pressure. And see if you can evaluate ~~this~~ these not just from a logical level (i.e., *factually* I believe it), but also from a *felt-sense* perspective (this actually *feels* true deeper down). You can also notice ~~the~~ statements that ~~seem you logically agree with~~ true but ~~that~~ still don't *feel like* quite true ~~the just yet, just yet~~.

Formatted: Font: Italic

## <list head>Truths About Childhood Sexual Abuse

<begin unnumbered list>[[Insert short blank line]] The abuse was not my fault.

[[Insert short blank line]] I had no real power to stop the abuse. I was a kid with a lot stacked against me—from the abuser and in my life.

[[Insert short blank line]] I didn't deserve what happened to me.

[[Insert short blank line]] Not fighting back didn't mean I wanted the abuse.

[[Insert short blank line]] Each form of sexual abuse I experienced was real, and it impacted me in some (even small) way I'm still trying to understand.

[[Insert short blank line]] I wasn't too old to be a victim of CSA.

[[Insert short blank line]] I am hurt and wounded, but not forever broken and defective.

[[Insert short blank line]] My experience was real and it still matters, even if others won't understand that.

[[Insert short blank line]] I don't need to compare my pain to anyone else's. Pain is pain, and its impact is real.

[[Insert short blank line]] My particular way of healing doesn't have to have a specific or well-planned timeline.

[[Insert short blank line]] Telling my story can be in my own time, in my own way, and with only safe, capable people in my life.

[[Insert short blank line]] It was not my job to protect myself from the abuser then.

[[Insert short blank line]] I did nothing to make the abuse continue, even if my relationship with the abuser continued.

[[Insert short blank line]] Trusting someone who hurt me does not make me at fault.

[[Insert short blank line]] I'm allowed to be impacted by the abuse, no matter how long it's been.

[[Insert short blank line]] The abuser used a lot of tactics to keep me powerless and confused. Even if they still confuse me, that's normal and okay.

[[Insert short blank line]] Caring about my abuser (then or even now) does not erase what he did.

[[Insert short blank line]] While it's hard to admit, I was helpless to the abuser, that was the truth, because I was a child.

[[Insert short blank line]] I can be nervous about healing and what that might bring into my life.

[[Insert short blank line]] I deserved better than I got from the abuser and those around me.

[[Insert short blank line]] I don't have to rescue others from my hurt or anger about the abuse.

[[Insert short blank line]] I was abused because I was in a vulnerable situation and stage of life. It was my circumstances, not something about me, that caused him to abuse me.

[[Insert short blank line]] I can learn to hold tough feelings about the abuse that I still avoid.

[[Insert short blank line]] Sexual abuse to a child really is big. I'm not being too sensitive or overreacting.

[[Insert short blank line]] My abuser's "good moments" do not erase any of the abuse.

[[Insert short blank line]] Liking the abuser's attention doesn't justify the abuse in any way.

[[Insert short blank line]] Liking the abuser's attention doesn't mean I wanted or kept the sexual abuse going.

[[Insert short blank line]] Feeling pleasure from the abuse doesn't mean there was something wrong with me, or that it wasn't abuse. I'm learning this is normal and common.

[[Insert short blank line]] Healing doesn't make the abuse less real, or let the abuser(s) or others off the hook.

[[Insert short blank line]] Participating in the abuse of other children doesn't mean I'm a perpetrator. That was part of the grooming and manipulating process by the abuser.

[[Insert short blank line]] Not feeling deeply impacted by the abuse doesn't mean it hasn't shaped me in some way.

[[Insert short blank line]] I experienced victimization in my childhood. That's part of my story. I was victimized.

[[Insert short blank line]] There might be struggles in my life now that are because of the sexual abuse I went through.

[[Insert short blank line]] I don't have to process every sexual abuse experience to heal. And I can choose where I start, continue from, or end.

[[Insert short blank line]] I am just as deserving of the empathy I feel for other CSA survivors.

[[Insert short blank line]] I did nothing to seduce the abuser. No healthy or safe adult is seduced by a child in any way.<end unnumbered list>

It's okay if some of these truths feel distant or even impossible right now. Healing takes time and happens in stages. Every small step ~~you take is~~ a part of the journey, ~~and so~~ it's okay to take ~~your time~~ all the time that you need.<end exercise>

### <ah>Where Do We Go from Here?

In chapter 3, we're going to look at the latest science about how CSA can impact a young brain and nervous system. This will help you to better understand why you might still be struggling with the effects of abuse.

But before we do that, in chapter 2, we're going to talk about grounding and pacing. These are vital to the healing process, and ~~to~~ will grow some foundation for the work of later chapters.

## <ah>Key Points

- <begin bulleted list>CSA is a violation of sexual boundaries during the critical years of infancy to eighteen years old. It always involves an abuse of power and is never the child's fault. CSA can take different forms including physical, psychological, emotional incest, exploitation, trafficking, or ritualized abuse.
- CSA can have lasting nervous system impacts even if there was no physical contact. Some of these include difficulties with trust (yourself and others), healthy boundaries, frequent emotional overwhelm, toxic shame, isolation, [needing excitement](#), fragmented memories, and living in coping or survival mode.
- Grooming is a subtle, ~~but~~ deliberate, and highly manipulative process. ~~abusers~~ [It helps abusers use to](#) gain trust, break down defenses, and keep [the](#) abuse hidden. Trauma bonding makes survivors feel attached to, and even protective of, the person who is abusing them.
- Healing begins by considering CSA truths: The abuse was never your fault, you were too young to consent, and your  ~~coping responses and~~ complex ~~feelings~~ [reactions](#) were [completely understandable and](#) normal.  ~~human reactions to something that should never have happened to you.~~<end bulleted list>

## <cn>Chapter 2

Commented [JW4]: AQ: Love this new intro!

### <ct>Building Your Grounding and Pacing

#### <begin story><sth>Rita's Story

Rita was struggling. She felt like everything in her life was either a race or a crawl. Her mind would often speed with thoughts of to-dos, constant worries about everything, and resentments toward others. Her partner would comment on Rita's loud way of walking, fast style of talking, and frequent fumbling with tasks. By the end of each week, Rita would finally collapse—she'd zone out, “not give a shit,” and drink wine to shut off. Rita wondered if this up-and-down pattern, now her way of life, resulted from her childhood abuse.<end story>

Although we'll explore the impact of CSA in chapter 3—especially how inescapable trauma reshapes a child's nervous system—there is one idea to keep in mind as you read this chapter: After CSA, especially if proper support ~~has~~~~was~~ ~~been~~ limited or absent, the nervous system ~~often shifts~~~~can shift~~ into a state of *imbalance*. In other words, for many, life ~~comes~~~~begins~~ to feel too fast or too slow, too overwhelming or shut down, or too much or not enough. This is the nature of trauma.

It's important to know that these inner experiences ~~and reactions to life~~ are not personality traits, flaws, or signs of brokenness—at all! They are the natural, long-term effects of a body and mind that had to cope with something no child should endure. Therefore, when safety, comfort, or protection are missing, the nervous system must ~~learn to quickly~~ adapt...~~and very quickly!~~. These adaptations can last into adulthood, making your (inner and outer) worlds feel chronically imbalanced.

In this chapter, we begin the work of ~~reestablishing~~ ~~bringing~~—a little more steadiness into your life. We'll do this using two important practices—the rebalancing offered through *grounding* and *pacing*.

Together, grounding and pacing can help you and your nervous system:

- Feel more anchored, present, and connected to yourself
- Navigate difficult moments with less overwhelm or shut down
- Notice more options for a healthier sense of control
- Move at a rhythm that respects your current limits and healing process

Again, for now, you don't need to ~~fully~~ understand your nervous system to begin this part of your healing work. ~~All you need~~ ~~You just need~~ to know ~~is~~ that your way of moving through ~~the world~~ ~~life~~ since the CSA makes complete and total sense. And now, there are also ways to soften the extremes so you can begin to feel a little more ~~of~~ ~~yy~~ yourself.

### <ah>What Are Grounding and Pacing?

What do we mean by *grounding*? Imagine grounding as an anchor that keeps you steady and connected to the present moment. With grounding you'll feel a little safer engaging yourself and others in your life. It will help you feel more open and curious, while ~~you~~ also managing ~~manage~~ the needs of your life. As your grounding skills grow, you'll navigate your thoughts and emotions without them taking over your sense of control. While this doesn't mean everything will ~~always~~ feel calm, you'll ~~be able to~~ ~~better~~ navigate life's challenges and ~~little~~ ~~small~~ joys.

What do we mean by *pacing*? Pacing skills help you balance your energy so life doesn't feel too fast or too slow. Because trauma requires extreme speeds to cope, the nervous system can default to either intensity or shut down. In fact, there's a term for this oscillation between too much and not enough—it's called *biphasic arousal* and it's common after trauma (Fisher 2017;

Levine 2010; Herman 1992; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Rothschild 2000). Therefore, pacing, like grounding, is vital to your healing because it gives you a new rhythm and a growing empowerment.

### <ah>Grounding and Pacing Exercises

Having a *regular* routine to grow [your](#) grounding and pacing ~~skills~~ is a necessary part of nervous system healing. It's exactly like strengthening a muscle in your body—the more consistently you practice, the stronger it gets. The cool thing is, this isn't just habit-building—being purposeful with this practice actually changes your brain and nervous system (Doidge 2015; Levine 2010; Ogden and Fisher 2015; Porges 2011; Siegel 2020). And, because it's a counter-response to the trauma, this practice lets you reclaim more flexibility.

As you take on these exercises, life will inevitably throw curveballs that ~~will effect~~ [affect](#) ~~your consistency~~ [the consistency of your practice](#). ~~If~~ [So, if](#) you miss a practice session, try not to be hard on yourself. Healing really is a journey with ebbs and flows. The important thing is to return to your routine when you can. ~~As~~ [Because as](#) the saying goes, the more you put in, the more you get out. As ~~time goes on~~ [your practice continues](#), your grounding and pacing will strengthen—[and](#) it will begin to feel more available to you.

While there are a number of grounding and pacing exercises, we will be working with five. Some may be familiar; others might be new. Using these (individually or together) can help in ~~a tougher~~ [situations](#), while also ~~growing~~ [strengthening](#) your ~~overall emotional and nervous system's physical~~ [regulation](#) ~~inside~~. Again, your consistency with these exercises is key.

(Please note, for exercises asking you to scale ~~your pre- or post-exercise~~ [your experiences](#) ~~reactions~~: 1 indicates the lowest or least, while 10 indicates the highest or most).

## <bh>Breathwork

Breathwork is a helpful practice for grounding and pacing because it reminds your nervous system how to slow down. It helps your mind and body ~~seek~~ [reach for more](#) balance, and can even help release trauma from your body (Brulé 2017; Brown and Gerbarg 2012; Dana 2018; Schwarz et al. 2017).

Although there are many ~~types~~ [varieties](#) of breathwork, we will practice three: *box breathing* to become more present, *fire breathing* to move and release anger and anxiety, and *heart breathing* for self-soothing and compassion. You can adjust each breath to fit your needs, so take your time to experiment with ~~what feels right just now~~ [each](#). (Video examples of each type of breath can be found at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>.)

### <ch>Box Breathing: Balancing Your Inside Speed

When your mind and body feel too fast or too slow, box breathing can bring greater grounding and pacing (Brown and Gerbarg 2012; Divine 2016). Box breathing is a simple and structured breath that can help you slow down or feel a little more present. This breath gets its name by shaping your breath into four balanced parts—like the sides of a box. This gentle pattern can bring more stability without stirring up traumatic material inside.

*Your practice:*

**Find a quiet place.** Ensure you won't be disturbed. Sit comfortably in a relaxed posture, with closed eyes or a soft gaze. You can do this in silence or with music that feels soothing. You're welcome to set a timer for this practice.

**Begin your breaths.** Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of four. Hold your breath for a count of four. Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of four. Hold again for a count of four.

**Repeat.** Continue this cycle of breathing for four ~~to five~~ rounds, ~~or as long as feels comfortable~~ until you begin to develop a nice rhythm. ~~Take your time to create a rhythm that feels consistent, letting your breath settle into a flow.~~ Aim for at least a 7 out of 10 on the comfort scale before moving to the next step.

**Noticing your body.** Once you have a nice cycle of breath, you can move your awareness into your body. Here, you are simply noticing ~~a place where too fast or too slow seems to be active~~ inside. For example, you may notice a sensation of butterflies in your stomach; tightness or bracing in your shoulders; speedy thoughts in your head; a buzzing in or around your body; or a sadness, heaviness, or stuckness in ~~a part of your body~~ your chest. If there are multiple areas, choose just one for now, whichever seems to get your attention.

**Sending the breath.** Now, as you inhale, visualize your box breath gently traveling to ~~the~~ this area of your body. Next say to ~~this~~ that speed: "I see you. This breath is for you. Please take your time." Repeat this phrase with each inhale, allowing the speed to experience this breath. During your box breathing, try not to judge, analyze or make anything happen.

**Closing.** Continue until you feel better, your timer sounds, or you're ready to close for just now. You can then journal about your experience, or any insights you had from the practice.

### <ch>Fire Breathing: Releasing Anxiety, Anger, and Pain

Fire breath (Brulé 2017; Schwarz et al. 2017) is a powerful tool for moving and releasing anger, anxiety, tension, and pain. It does this in a way that's slow and controlled, so its process feels ~~well-paced~~ well-paced and tolerable. Fire breath ~~lets~~ helps difficult energy ~~inside have a slow and safe outlet to gently release. It can also,~~ bringing you more ~~presence and lightness~~ lightness and presence.

*Your practice:*

**Find a quiet place.** Ensure you won't be disturbed. Sit comfortably in a relaxed posture, with closed eyes or a soft gaze. You can do this in silence or with music that feels soothing. You're welcome to set a timer for this practice.

**Beginning your breaths.** Take a deep breath in through your nose. Allow your belly to expand to a degree that feels comfortable. Remember to do this slowly and consciously so you can find a ~~nicely paced~~ nice rhythm of breath.

**Exhale.** On the out breath, exhale with a slow and long sound of "ahhhhh." This exhale will come from the *very back of your throat*, making a slow raspy sound as it releases.

**Repeat.** Take your time and repeat for at least three rounds of breath, ~~just~~ again letting the breath find a nice, rhythmic flow.

**Noticing Notice a sensation.** Now, gently scan your body and notice a difficult feeling or sensation you'd like to mobilize today. Bring your awareness to the part of your body where this feeling (tension, anxiety, frustration, anger, or pain) seems to be sitting. On each inhale, pull the breath into to that space, then ~~holding~~ hold for a count of three to ~~four~~ five seconds.

**Exhaling Exhale with sound.** When you're ready, slowly exhale the breath, imagining some of the feeling leaving along with it. Feel this release through that raspy "ahhhhh" sound—you can even imagine fire, smoke, or heat leaving too (Schwarz et al. 2017). Again, ~~t~~Take your time. Go at your own pace.

**Tracking.** After three to five rounds of breaths, pause to notice any changes—something in your body that feel better or just different. You don't need to analyze or make anything happen; remember this is just about allowing and observing. You can sit with and enjoy any changes that feel better, or you can continue ~~your~~ fire breaths with what you notice now (either the original sensation or a new version of it).

**Repeat.** You can do the number of rounds that feel comfortable [today, just](#) noticing what's happening inside as you do.

**Close and journal.** When you feel ready or your timer sounds, finish your practice with some box breaths to ground. You can then journal your experience, and any insights you had.

### <ch>Heart Breathing: For Gentle Compassion

Heart breath (Gilbert 2010; Schwarz et al. 2017; Salzberg 2020) is a nurturing practice that grows self-compassion, warmth, and internal support. Heart breathing is helpful when you're feeling vulnerable or lonely, or when you need some attention through comfort and soothing. Because this breath focuses on your heart area, it teaches you how to feel cared for from within. For those who've experienced trauma in childhood, the heart area often feels sore, heavy, or guarded.

Heart breathing allows you to practice self-connection, while learning to pace with patience and gentle presence. It can also create newer pathways in your brain that associate your heart with compassion and presence (Salzberg 2020). Finally, it ~~can~~ reminds you that in difficult moments, you can also turn inward ~~to~~ for [gentle gentle](#) support.

*Your practice:*

**Find a quiet place.** Ensure you won't be disturbed. Sit comfortably in a relaxed posture, with closed eyes or a soft gaze. You can do this in silence or with music that feels soothing. You're welcome to set a timer for this practice.

**Noticing-Notice your heart.** Place one or both hands over your heart (either on your body or hovering just above) and allow the warmth of your hand to settle onto [\(or into\)](#) your chest. Go slowly and take your time. This gentle touch helps you connect with your heart while still feeling grounded and paced in the moment (if physical touch doesn't feel comfortable right now, you

can experiment with distance—(e.g., putting something between your hand and your heart—)or even skipping this step [for](#) today).

**Inhale into your heart.** Imagine [that](#) your ~~inhaled-this~~ breath [is](#) coming [up](#) from the earth, [travelling up -up your-through your](#) feet (or down from the sky through the top of your head) [and into your heart](#). You can also [picture-visualize](#) this breath as an energy or another image that feels pleasing to you. ~~Now, slowly inhale into the space of your heart.~~

**Talking to your heart.** Hold the breath there for three to five seconds [while](#). ~~Say saying to your heart to your heart,~~“This ~~gentle~~-breath is for you. You’re welcome to [feel](#) as much as you like ~~for now.~~”

**Exhale [and repeat](#).** Now, slowly exhale over five to eight seconds:

~~Repeat.~~ [Repeat, then repeat](#) this process for three to five rounds.

Again, as you use this breath, you don’t have to make anything happen. Gently offer the breath to your heart, then just notice. Pleasant sensations at even a 2 out of 10 are okay, and something you can sit with or [choose to](#) enjoy.

Finally, ~~when-if~~ you’re feeling a need to support someone you love, heart breath can be offered to their heart [too](#)—this can be done while sitting with them, or privately when [you’re](#) on your own.

### **<bh>Vocal Toning or Humming: For Grounding and Release**

Vocal toning or humming (Levine 2010; Porges 2011; Porges and Dana 2018; Schwarz et al. 2017) is an ancient practice that’s part of many different ~~therapies~~[therapy practices](#): somatic experiencing therapy, sensorimotor psychotherapy, comprehensive resource model (CRM), music therapy, polyvagal-based therapies, yoga, and expressive arts therapies. Toning and humming are powerful tools—their vibrations soothe the nervous system while mobilizing stuck

trauma material. Vocalizing is a very organic practice that can be especially useful when other tools aren't helping.

*Your practice:*

**Find a quiet place.** Ensure you won't be disturbed. Sit comfortably in a relaxed posture with eyes closed or a soft gaze. You can do this in silence or with music you find soothing. You're welcome to set a timer for this practice if you like.

**Settling Settle in.** Start by taking a few gentle box breaths to help your body settle into the moment.

**Scan and notice.** When you feel ready, scan inside your body and notice where something difficult is activating (e.g., a particular emotion, sensation, thought, or image). This can be something specific to the present (e.g., something upsetting from today), or a repeating issue you notice right now.

**Finding the sound.** Now sit with the issue you've chosen today and begin to intuit the sound it might have. In other words, if you were to "tone the tone" of this particular issue (Schwarz et al. 2017), what sound might it have or make if it could (e.g., "ahhhh," "aaaaa," "eeeeee," "iiiiii," "ohhhh," "uuuuu," "rrrrr," or even a humming sound ("mmmmm") of a particular pitch and tone)? Because this isn't a logic-based practice, you don't have to know why—you can just intuit and allow.

<begin text box>When people talk about this practice, they often say things like, "I'm not

sure why, but this feeling wants a long ‘ohhhh’ sound at a medium volume.” Or “I don’t know why, but the anger in my gut wants a slow, deep ‘rrrrr’ sound at a low pitch and volume.” By offering your inner experiences ~~a release through~~ sound, it lets them be seen, heard, and ~~expressed-released~~ without judgment. And this gives them a more organic way to mobilize—because these issues don’t always release through ~~talking or logic~~ logic or talk.<end text box>

**Refocusing.** If your attention ~~starts drifting~~ drifts or ~~you’re a little too in~~ you’re too into your head, gently bring your awareness back to your issue, ~~and where you~~. Feel where it is feel it active in your body now. ~~then~~ Continue to experiment with the sound(s) it might need.

**Toning and/or humming.** Once you find the sound and volume that feels right (enough) for your chosen issue, begin to tone or hum ~~this its~~ sound for a slow round of three to five ~~rounds of~~ breaths. Take ~~any any~~ breaks ~~that you~~ might need in between rounds.

**Pause and assess.** Now, pause and attune to your issue in this moment. If it feels better, just notice that and enjoy. ~~You can even~~, or tone ~~or the sound~~ hum the sound for of that more pleasant feeling ~~that has arrived~~. If a change has happened but it doesn’t feel pleasant, you can find *its* particular tone and continue the process. If the issue feels exactly the same, you can return to the sound or experiment with a new one.

**Tracking your comfort.** If at any point the practice becomes intense, slow down or take a break, ~~and or~~ do some breath work to groundre-ground. You can ~~even also shift begin to~~ toning or humming the sound something positive to you (e.g., a pleasing image, a cherished item, or a safe person you love). ~~that feels positive to you~~.

**Closing Close.** When your timer sounds or you feel finished for today, ~~you~~ close your practice with some breathwork that's grounding. You can then journal about your experience, or any insights you had during the practice.

Vocal toning and humming and can bring up ~~a range of~~ different sensations, emotions, and even images in the mind. Some people feel warmth, tingling, or a lightening ~~or of~~ some kind, ~~or of a sense of~~ movement or release in their body. Some feel emotions associated with calm or, relief, ~~or even~~ while others notice ~~sadness or grief~~ more difficult emotions. ~~And, S~~ sometimes things ~~come can even come up up that that offer us offer~~ clues for ~~our our~~ deeper healing. Again, the goal here is to connect with one issue to offer it movement and presence through gentle sound.

### <bh>Body-Cocooning: For Containment

The practice of mentally cocooning your body can bring a felt sense of more balanced containment. Sexual trauma can deeply erode ~~impact this feeling~~ body boundaries, so the body ~~now can~~ feels too exposed or too guarded (Fisher 2021; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; van der Kolk 2014). A sense that your body belongs safely to you might be a new experience that you're now exploring.

Body cocooning can help your body feel safer—when you're either alone or around other people. And just like the other exercises in this chapter, you can experiment with different types of cocoons you might need.

*Your practice:*

**Find a quiet place.** Ensure you won't be disturbed. Sit comfortably in a relaxed posture with closed eyes or a soft gaze. You can do this in silence or with music that feels soothing. You're welcome to set a timer for this practice.

**Settle in.** Take three to five gentle box breaths to help your body settle into this practice.

**Welcome your cocoon.** Now, imagine or feel the presence of a cocoon-shaped outline beginning to encircle (a part of) your body. Your cocoon might be made of light, ~~an~~ energy, or a type of material that feels pleasing ~~to you~~. It may have a color or a specific shape, or it might be thick or thin. It may have some type of movement about it, or arrive very still. It might also ~~be~~ feel close to the edges of your body, or a little (or a lot) farther out. You're welcome to purposefully create your cocoon or simply experiment with what naturally arrives. It's really important to be patient with this process and allow yourself to just take your time.

**Take pauses to assess.** ~~Take your time to~~ Now gently assess if your cocoon brings you feelings of containment, protection, or some kind of easing. If your body cocoon doesn't feel quite right, you can experiment to see what might feel better. You can play with different aspects such as its distance from your body, its ~~felt-sense~~ felt sense of speed, its thickness, or material. In fact, you can have different cocoons for different parts of your life: certain emotions, sensations, situations, memories, or even for the different people you engage. All of this is perfectly fine—and a really important part of the process.

**Noticing “the nice.”** Once your body cocoon feels right (enough) for today, begin to notice how this feels for your body (e.g., allows a softening, relief, comfort, and so on). ~~Even if the strength of these feelings is a 2 or 3 out of 10, please know that this is just fine.~~ If your cocoon activates pleasant sensations, take twenty seconds to simply be with these. ~~Even if these feelings are a 2 out of 10, enjoying this level is still perfectly fine.~~ Then Next, take a short break ~~before you and then~~ reconnect, and repeat this process for three to five rounds.

**Closing.** Once your timer sounds or you feel ready to close, your cocoon can stay with you or fade just for for just now. ~~It's important to remember that~~ Creating body boundaries that aren't

Commented [JW5]: AQ: what is the reader reconnecting with?

too tight or too loose may feel ~~kind of kind-of~~ new, so be patient with this. ~~Therefore,~~  
~~regular~~Regular practice while ~~taking your time~~experiment with options is a key way to ~~play~~  
~~with~~grow this new sense inside.

### <bh>Your Goldilocks Zones: Finding a Just-Right (Enough) Pace Inside

As you've learned, CSA can cause nervous systems to develop a pacing that's biphasic in nature (oscillating between states of intensity and shutdown). If this resonates with you, Goldilocks zones is a practice to work with ~~this-your~~ internal ~~pacings~~speeds. Like Goldilocks herself, you'll be learning to notice what's "too hot," "too cold," and also "just right" (or just right enough). This practice will let you work with these speeds without scorning, ~~fighting~~avoiding, or ~~trying~~fighting to fix them.

*Your practice:*

**Find a quiet place.** Ensure you won't be disturbed. Sit or lie down with closed eyes or a soft gaze. You can do this in silence or with music that feels soothing. You're welcome to set a timer for this practice.

**Settle in.** Start with some breath work, or vocal toning or humming to ground yourself ~~into~~ this present moment.

**Scan your body.** Now, bring your attention to the interior of your body. You can do a detailed scan or simply notice your body's general sections (e.g., above or below the waist, your left or right side, your front or back ~~of your body~~body, and so on).

**Locate a speed.** Locate the felt-sense of *one* inner speed that ~~you notice that~~ feels tolerable for you to work with today (a downloadable chart outlining these speeds is available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>). Next, notice where in your body this speed seems active. If you've located a speed that is running too fast, it might have these sensations: agitated, antsy,

buzzing, clenched, compressed, distracted, fidgety, electrified, hot, racing, spinney, tight, or vibrating. If you're noticing a speed that's idling too slow, it might have these sensations: cold, collapsed, dull, empty, flat, floppy, foggy, gooey, hazy, heavy "meh," numb, spacey, stuck, or "zoney."

**Be curious and suspend judgment.** Once you've chosen and located your target speed, ~~simply~~ allow yourself ~~simply be~~ with it. Avoid judgment, analysis, or trying to change it. Observe it objectively—as it is in this moment.

**Engage the speed.** Once you're connected, you can work with this speed by:

- ~~Noticing-Find~~ a mental image or metaphor that represents ~~it-the~~ speed (e.g., a shape, color, texture, or specific image). Notice the feel of the speed and the image that pairs with it. You can offer this presence through twenty second intervals.
  - Connecting with the speed, saying, "I see you. I feel your pace just now. You're welcome here. I'm learning to just notice and connect with you." You can offer three rounds of these statements, then pause to observe how the speed reacts (e.g., slows down, speeds up, stays the same). Again, simply notice.
  - Offering it breath work, or toning or humming, or specific cocooning to support it just now. eeeooning. For example, you can say to the speed, "This fire breath is for you. I'll offer you three rounds and then just observe." Or, "I'll tone the ~~tone-sound~~ of your speed for four rounds and then pause to notice ~~the feel of your pace~~ any changes that makes." Or, "let's create ~~a eeeoon that can support.~~ a nice cocoon for you. Let's experiment with size, color, and material." ~~The key here is to and work with this speed as it is.~~
- bulleted list>

**Choosing a just-right speed.** As part of healing, many women are ready ~~for is~~ to work with more ~~balanced-regulated~~ speeds inside. ~~More-regulated-Internal balance speeds~~ can ~~often~~ feel limited ~~inside~~, so ~~women want to~~ ~~finding~~ explore a speed ~~that's that's~~ just right (enough) ~~is~~ ~~important~~. ~~To locate a~~ ~~A~~ ~~pace that feels more~~ ~~more~~ regulated ~~pace~~ it might include these sensations: awake, balanced, calm, clear, contented, flowing, focused, lighter, open, relaxed, relieved, settled, softer, steady, warm. Even if the sensation is the size of a fingernail, you can work with this, using the processes above.

**Borrowing a just-right pace.** If ~~locating it's tough to find~~ a just-right speed ~~inside your body is~~ ~~difficult~~, you can find something *outside* of your body ~~instead to~~ ~~help~~. This might be: a soothing color, a pleasing object, imagining a regulated person you know, a guru you follow, a lovely sound, a favorite song, a gentle fabric, and so on. ~~Now-Now, see if you can imagine~~ ~~imagine~~ ~~the~~ ~~pace of~~ ~~this object~~ ~~what this object's something or someone's balanced pace might feel like~~ — then *borrow* this ~~pace~~ ~~speed~~ to “put into” your body. Even if it’s slight or ~~it~~ ~~this~~ ~~pace~~ or comes and goes, ~~just~~ ~~keep~~ ~~returning~~ your attention back to its feel. As this strengthens, you can begin work with ~~more~~ ~~this~~ ~~speeds~~ ~~so~~ by applying some of the processes above.

### **<bh>Tucking-In Exercise: For Pacing and Rest**

As kids—and adults—tucking-in rituals prepare our nervous system to wind down and rest. Such routines signal that it’s ~~now~~ safe to ~~now~~ calm and put away the ~~different~~ issues of the day. Therefore, tucking in isn’t ~~only~~ ~~just~~ about getting cozy. It’s also about quieting different aspects of our life. It’s true that our thoughts, feelings, situations, and to-dos also need respite so we can rest too.

For women with histories of CSA, tuck-ins in childhood may have been absent or unsafe. Moreover, if no space was offered when our tough moments happened, our body couldn’t learn

Formatted: Font: Italic

how to pause and just be. ~~So it had to~~ [It might have felt safer to](#) ~~default to just~~ [simply staying](#) ~~stay~~ active, seeing periods of rest as indulgent or even dangerous. That's why learning to tuck in is an important part of healing—it teaches our system ~~now~~ [how to take a pause and have respite](#) ~~trust~~ [and unwind](#).

Your tucking-in practice (Schwarz et al. 2017) can be used at day's end to help you and your body downshift into rest. It can also be used to offer a pause after healing work, or give respite to triggers or tough situations. The really great thing about the tucking-in practice is its permission and reminder that intermissions can be safe.

*Your practice:*

**Find a quiet place.** Ensure you won't be disturbed. Sit comfortably in a relaxed posture, with closed eyes or a soft gaze. You can do this in silence or with music that feels soothing. You're welcome to set a timer for this practice.

**Settle in.** Choose a form of breath work or vocal toning or humming to [slowly](#) settle into ~~the~~ [this moment](#) [practice today](#).

**Notice something ~~inside that needs tucking in~~.** Whether you're preparing for rest or you're in the middle of your day, notice ~~what~~ [something](#) you want (or need) to tuck in ([e.g., a feeling, a body sensation, a situation, a person, a particular task, and so on](#)) ~~for just now~~.

**A tucking-in spot.** Imagine a tucking-in location for this issue. This can ~~include~~ [be](#) a (metaphoric or real) safe container, a cozy room, a space in nature, or a distant location like a different city, country, or even another planet. Don't worry about the logistics or ~~the~~ physics of this. Notice what's right for today, as you prepare to tuck in.

**Tucking it in.** Now, connect with this issue and ~~gently~~ say to it [slowly](#), "It's time to pause now. It's okay to tuck in. I've created a nice place for you [to](#) rest. Our respite doesn't mean I'm letting

you go. You're important to me, and I promise I'll return. I'll see you soon. ~~Now, off~~Off you go for now." If you like or need, you can ~~slowly~~repeat these words ~~for three or four rounds~~(like you might with a child ~~also who is~~ learning to settle). If you sense hesitation, ~~know this is normal and just a part of the learning~~this is really quite normal ~~process~~. ~~You~~You can offer your issue ~~can offer~~(without urgency or force) fire breath for resistance, vocal toning or humming for anxiety, ~~or or a specific~~even a cocoon for ~~some~~ some additional containment.

**Notice any sensations of regulation.** ~~You might become aware of feelings of~~As you tuck in you ~~may feel~~ some regulation inside (e.g., slight easing, a little relief, some calming, and so on) even if it's the size of a fingernail. ~~Just~~Again, just attune to and enjoy this sensation ~~inside~~in your ~~body~~. You can even enhance it with some vocal toning or heart breaths.

#### <ah>Natural Expectations

Take a moment to honor the effort you're making as you're teaching your system to better ground and pace. At first, these exercises may feel odd or awkward—this is ~~really very~~ normal ~~okay~~ and will shift over time. Like any new practice, you need patience and consistency. Please remember *each* practice ~~matters—it makes~~does make a difference inside.

Finally, stay curious as you're learning to integrate these exercises. Some will feel natural (you may come to have favorites) while others ~~will may~~ take longer, ~~—and some may even~~or ~~stay stay~~tucked in for now. But it's important to keep showing up, keep learning, keep practicing—these tools will be vital as we travel this book.

Let's keep going...

#### <ah>Key Points

- <begin bulleted list>CSA disrupts our sense of balance, time, rhythm, and flow. An important part of healing involves reclaiming more regulation through grounding and pacing.
- Grounding acts like an anchor, helping you feel safer, more present, and capable of handling different emotions, situations, and life's challenges. Pacing regulates your internal speed, preventing cycles of feeling either too fast or too slow (biphasic arousal) either inside [your body](#) or ~~in~~-[out in](#) your life.
- Five core practices to grow grounding and pacing in the nervous system include: breathwork (box, fire, and heart breathing), vocal toning and humming, body-cocooning, Goldilocks speeds, and tucking in.
- Healing through grounding and pacing practices takes patience, curiosity, and routine—progress grows over time, even ~~with~~-[after a few](#) setbacks. Consistency is key!<end bulleted list>

### <cn>Chapter 3

#### <ct>The Polyvagal Theory <cs>A New Way to Understand Yourself After CSA

When you experience CSA, it can change the way you see yourself, others, and even the world [around you](#). Many women find their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors have changed in ways that ~~remain~~ [are still](#) tough to understand. It can also be frustrating when you've tried different strategies but old triggers and reactions continue to activate. You start to wonder if what happened ~~to you~~ in [your](#) childhood now needs something more.

In 2011, a different way to understand trauma arrived. Psychologist and researcher Dr. Stephen Porges introduced the evidence-based and highly regarded polyvagal theory (PVT) of trauma. The PVT is important because it shows why post-traumatic issues can endure—even after [positive therapy interventions](#). It also offers insight into what a nervous system needs to better process CSA trauma.

The PVT is different because it looks beyond trauma's impact on ~~just~~ [just](#) the mind. It also shows how trauma can alter the *deeper nervous system*—primitive parts of the brain and body that don't respond to logic, reason, ~~or~~ conscious choice, [or a sense of time](#) (Fisher 2017; Lanius, Paulsen, and Corrigan 2014; Levine 2010; Porges 2011; van der Kolk 2014). The PVT shows how *unprocessed threat-response patterns* can stay locked in the brain long after trauma. ~~It~~ [And it](#) explains why we can still over- and underreact ~~even decades after CSA~~ [even decades after CSA](#). As it turns out, healing ~~trauma needs~~ [needs](#) more than ~~different~~ [different](#) thoughts and behaviors—it must also ~~reach~~ [work with issues in the traumatized](#) ~~deeper~~ nervous system ~~injuries~~ (Fisher 2017; Levine 2010; Maté and Maté 2022; Porges 2011; van der Kolk 2014).

#### <begin story><sth>Sofia's Story

Sofia felt exhausted. After three years of therapy with two different therapists, she still

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

found herself triggered by men like her uncle. These triggers would send Sofia into spirals where self-doubt, insecurity, and toxic shame took over. She struggled to sleep or focus on her work, her mind buzzing with endless replays of the past. Sofia said, “I know the abuse wasn’t my fault. And I know these men are not my uncle. So why can’t I shake these old reactions, especially when I know better?”

Through the PVT, Sofia saw that it wasn’t just her mind taking her back to the abuse. Deeper parts of her brain and nervous system remained traumatized, *still activating defense cycles that hadn’t completed*. Though Sofia now logically knew she was safe—and had healthier ways to cope and talk to herself—she ~~understood~~ was learning that deeper parts of her nervous her system remained on alert ~~remained still primed for~~ on alert for the next danger and the next attack.

Formatted: Font: Italic

This realization was a breakthrough for Sofia and one that shifted the direction of her therapy.<end story>

### <ah>Your Nervous System During Trauma

Your body has a built-in system that quietly supports you behind the scenes. This is called your *autonomic nervous system (ANS)* and it’s responsible for things you don’t have to think about—your breathing, heart rate, internal organ functioning, and even how you react to safety and danger. Your ANS is active every moment of your life, helping you adapt to what’s needed each day.

There are two branches of your ANS that play key roles in your everyday life:

- ~~<begin bulleted list>~~*Parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS)*: This branch of your ANS helps you feel calm and connected to your life. It’s like a natural regulator or peacekeeper for your body, helping you stay balanced both physically and emotionally. When a

particular part of your PSNS is activated, you feel a healthy sense of control, safe connection with yourself and others, and an ability to function well in [the](#) different areas of your life (Dana 2018; Ogden and Fisher 2015; Porges 2011).

- *Sympathetic nervous system (SNS)*: The other branch of your ANS is your sympathetic nervous system—the vital part of your system that gets you ready for action. Your SNS activates ~~specific~~[the specific](#) -brain and body chemistry ~~needed~~ [needed](#) for ~~more~~ intense focus, motivation, and ~~mental~~ and physical effort. This important system keeps you alert and energized when different aspects of your life require it (Fisher 2017; Porges 2011; Dana 2018; van der Kolk 2014).<end bulleted list>

### <bh>Your First-Line Defenses

When you encounter a threat or danger, your body [also](#) relies on these two branches of your ANS. In fact, there are three main ways these two branches do this: through *social engagement*, *fight-or-flight*, and *freeze-shutdown*.

### <ch>Social Engagement (Window of Tolerance State—PSNS Function)

When your nervous system detects a threat or danger, its first line of defense is *social engagement* (Dana 2018; Fisher 2017; Porges 2011). Here, your PSNS will motivate you to *engage* and *seek support*—from ~~others~~: friends, family, or a helpful authority. It could even prompt you to call out to strangers if ~~the~~[the](#) threat is close or more immediate. If help from others isn't an option, social engagement will ~~help you~~ connect with the threat. You'll become focused, make eye contact, use a steady voice and compelling words, all to negotiate your return

to safety. And if dysregulation continues after the event, social engagement ~~can~~will connect you to safe others in your life—for loving support and to process what happened.

### <ch>Fight-or-Flight (Hyper-Arousal State—SNS Function)

If social engagement doesn't return you to safety, your SNS will (automatically) activate your *fight-or-flight* defense. Here, your nervous system quickly ~~assesses~~determines that ~~defense~~ fighting or escaping is what's needed to help you. Your SNS is amazing because it quickly rapidly changes your brain and body chemistry to do things you normally couldn't. Your blood flow increases, your focus intensifies, and your muscles become very strong and powerful. The energy you need to fight hard or run fast is suddenly available for you.

### <ch>Completing the Defense Cycle

Here what's important to know: If your social engagement or fight-or-flight defense eliminates the threat and returns you to safety, it means you were able to effectively *mobilize* and *complete the-that cycle of defense* (Levine 1997, 2010). ~~And As~~ it turns out, this matters—a lot! ~~Being able to~~Because not only do you successfully eliminate ~~a-the threat~~threat but, in doing so, ~~you- through the~~ discharge ~~of this~~all of that ~~defensive~~ defense-based ~~energy~~ chemistry (i.e., intense social engagement or fight-or-flight energy) that activated to help you. ~~also allows~~This lets your nervous system ~~to~~ return to healthy balance ~~and healthy functioning~~ soon ~~afterward~~after the event is over. In other words, your chances of developing post-traumatic issues ~~is~~are greatly reduced—~~you were able to complete this cycle of defense~~ (Fisher 2017; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Levine 1997, 2010; Porges 2011; van der Kolk 2014). Moreover, if ~~a the~~ defense wasn't effective, and ~~a trauma~~you had to endure trauma ~~occurred~~, proper use of social engagement *afterward* (from a safe parent, teacher, or skilled therapist) can also mitigate

Formatted: Highlight

post-traumatic issues (Fisher 2017; Ogden, Minton and Pain 2006; Porges and Dana 2018; van der Kolk 2014).

Therefore, these two built-in defenses can return us to safety, while helping reduce post-traumatic suffering **afterward!**

### **<begin exercise><exh>Journal: Completed Defenses**

As you read, you might recall times when your nervous system rose to a true threat or danger—reaching out to someone, directly asserting yourself, or moving into fight-or-flight energy to help you. And if these were successful and you recovered well afterward, these are examples of you completing a defense cycle.

Below are some journal prompts to explore past experiences to help you integrate what you're learning here. You can choose at least two and write about an event that feels comfortable to explore just now:

- **<begin bulleted list>**Describe a time when connection (i.e., social engagement) with someone helped you feel safe enough to stay present and deal with a challenging (or threatening) experience.
- Describe a situation in your life when a fight-or-flight response helped you neutralize a **true** threat or danger.
- Describe a situation when your fight-or-flight defense surprised you by activating outside your conscious control.
- Does your body remember a time when it activated a-social engagement or fight-or-flight defense, and it felt good afterward (i.e., you felt like you completed a helpful defensive action, and you were truly able to rebalance **and move on** soon afterward)?**<end bulleted list><end exercise>**

## **<bh>The Last-Resort Defense: Freeze-Shutdown (Hypo-Arousal State—PSNS Function)**

What if social engagement or fight-or-flight are not enough to eliminate a threat or danger? In other words, what if harm is going to happen, and there are no other options for escape? According to the PVT, now a different part of our PSNS will *automatically* activate our *last-resort defense*—an ancient form of protection called *freeze-shutdown* (which we briefly discussed at the beginning of chapter 2).

Freeze-shutdown is like a built-in emergency brake that resides deep in the brain and body. It's a vital defense when we've run out of options (when you can't negotiate-with, seek support for, fight off, or escape a threat) and harm or suffering is inevitable.

Through freeze-shutdown, your nervous system wants to ensure four things (Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Levine 1997, 2010; Porges 2011; van der Kolk 2014):

- You stay ~~still and quiet~~ quiet and still to notice any potential escape options that arises.
- You stay ~~still and quiet~~ quiet and still to avoid provoking further aggression.
- You don't ~~aggress or~~ resist so the harm is over as quickly as possible.
- You have a way to mentally escape the suffering you can't escape physically.

————— ~~Here,~~ To accomplish this, all of that intense social engagement and fight-or-flight energy (and its brain and body chemistry) must now quickly ~~stop and~~ lock down. ~~In addition,~~ ~~our~~ Our -freeze-shutdown defense ~~creates a brain and body state to~~ can then immobilize us—making e-us physically numb, mentally dissociated, temporarily paralyzed, or even unconscious—until the abuse is over. As trauma expert Peter Levine strongly asserts (1997, 2010), this type of immobilizing is *not* weakness, failure, or consent—of any kind! It is a

primitive but necessary automatic defense that helps minimize greater harm while getting us through an overwhelming experience.

[[Insert fig 1 here. Production: Please convert the chart to black and white.]]

### <ah>The Trauma Code—Mobilizing vs. Immobilizing

That was a lot of information, so let's do a quick review. When something frightening happens and our mobilizing defenses (social engagement and fight-or-flight) successfully eliminate a threat and return us to safety, our nervous system can return to ~~its normal~~ [balanced functioning afterward](#). ~~balance and functioning afterward~~—lowering our chances of developing post-traumatic issues. But when these defenses will not ~~be enough~~ [help](#), and ~~we must endure~~ [trauma is inevitable](#), the nervous system will activate our last-resort defense: the primitive response called freeze-shutdown. This automatic reaction is all about immobility, because stillness can reduce further harm, while helping us endure (or even survive!) the trauma.

Generally, immobilizing, in and of itself, isn't harmful to a nervous system *as long as it's paired with safety and calm* (e.g., a swaddled baby happily resting in her mother's warm embrace or a woman snuggled tightly with her safe and loving partner). Here, immobility is paired with social engagement—it is not about freezing or shutting down in fear. In fact, not only does this feel good and build connection, [but](#) it can actually grow and enhance healthy nervous system functioning (Dana 2018; Porges 2011). ~~That's~~ [In fact, that's](#) why immobility paired with calm is so important during the critical period of childhood.

The problem occurs when immobility is *paired with fear or high stress* (Porges and Dana 2018; Porges 2011). Not only does this activate ~~the~~ [our](#) freeze-shutdown response, but it requires a locking down of all that brain-body chemistry ~~that~~ initially activated to help us engage, fight,

or flee. It turns out, not properly remobilizing and releasing this locked down chemistry (and its energy) after the trauma can be very toxic to a nervous system—~~again~~, especially ~~during that critical period of childhood if the brain is still development-developing~~ (Ogden and Fisher 2015; Porges 2011; Siegel 2020; Schore 2002; van der Kolk 2014). ~~Without-Therefore, without this proper remobilizing and~~ release and completion afterward, you become like a boiling pot with the lid shut tight. The pressure remains. That old energy bubbles and churns. It leaks out and spurts until the pressure breaks through. Then the lid is replaced, the pot ~~begins boiling-boils~~ again, and the process now repeats.

If only this energy could just fade over time, or drain out through talking, ~~new insights,~~ ~~or~~ belief and behavior changes. ~~But it doesn't. For-But for true-deeper~~ healing to finally take hold, we must ~~also return to that still complete that still -unfinished defense cycle cycle of defense.~~ We must ~~and~~ help it remobilize to finally complete (Levine 1997, 2010; Ogden and Fisher 2015; Swart 2019; van der Kolk 2014) so our nervous system can return to its normal balance and functioning (Levine 1997, 2010; Ogden and Fisher 2015; Swart 2019; van der Kolk 2014).

When we remobilize and ~~then~~ discharge that old, shutdown energy, two things begin to happen: We calm long-held post-traumatic reactions, ~~while and we gain we gain~~ access to healthier nervous states and ~~their~~ abilities.

### <ah>Remobilizing and Completing an Old Defense Cycle

Once they learn about this part of healing, almost every woman asks the following question: “This makes a lot of sense. So, now, how do we do this?” In the chapters ahead, we’ll walk step by step through ways to experiment with gentle mobilizing practices—interventions you can try on your own, or with a skilled clinician trained in these methods. The good news is,

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

deeper healing is still possible for you. With the right tools and support, your system can begin to loosen, and find gentle movement, and finally feel some of the greater freedom—even if it's been a long time.

For now, a good take-away is that the trauma is not all in your mind—literally! It has also been living in your deep brain and body. And it's been waiting for the chance to complete what it couldn't all those years ago.

### <begin story><sth>Sofia's Story: Making Sense of Her Trauma Now

Sofia was intrigued after learning about these three defensive strategies. She now understood why her uncle still triggered her. In fact, Sofia noticed other defensive reactions in she'd have in situations that were actually safe and manageable. Sofia now saw that challenging old beliefs, trying new ways of behaviors, and using better coping skills skills just still weren't enough. Her nervous system needed to discharge that old defense energy—that the chemistry that locked down during her inescapable abuse.

Here's how Sofia saw it now:

When her uncle's abuse first started during a sleepover, Sofia initially tried social engagement to stop him. She asked to call her parents, but her uncle said that they wouldn't be were unavailable. Sofia then attempted jokes and fun board games to change his behavior “back to normal.”

When this didn't work, Sofia fled to her room to hide under the covers to escape. When her uncle came in and continued to assault her, Sofia's body then began to fight—kicking and yelling at him to stop and get away.

Because of her age and childlike size, Sofia was no match for this determined man. It was here that her Her nervous system now activated its last-resort defense—Sofia began to freeze and

shut down. Initially, Sofia's body became still but alert in case an option to escape presented. But when it didn't, her mind became hazy and far away, and her body went numb, heavy, and slack. Sofia's nervous system knew ~~the~~ abuse was inevitable. Its job ~~now~~ was ~~now~~ to minimize harm, quicken the event, and help Sofia ~~endure~~ ~~get through~~ it.

In understanding her nervous system's protection responses, Sofia felt a growing sense of self-compassion. Her loyal brain and body were just doing their job—getting Sofia through something far too much for any child.<end story>

<begin exercise><exh>**Journal: Mobilizing Clues**

If it feels comfortable, reflect on a time when you had a strong reaction to something that was actually benign—a sound, smell, person, video, or comment. Could this have been your body trying to complete an old protection response ~~and~~ ~~by~~ releasing ~~old~~ ~~stuck~~ energy from trauma? Could your strong reaction have been your nervous system thinking you're still at risk in some way?

You can journal about one of these experiences and explore what your body might have been telling you through these reactions. You can also notice ways ~~in the present day~~ your body might be trying to remobilize energy that had to lock down during trauma. For example, you might notice bouncing your leg when talking to an irritating person, clenching your fists when watching a show involving abuse, biting your lips when you feel too seen or exposed, sleeping in a position that allows ~~for~~ quick escape, feeling compelled to run or overexercise, cutting your skin to feel something besides numbness, feeling easily victimized to seek connection and support, or fantasies about fighting a bully. ~~Despite what you might know logically,~~ ~~T~~ these can be clues about ~~incomplete~~ ~~defensive~~ reactions ~~that couldn't complete~~ ~~from~~ ~~in~~ the past. In fact,

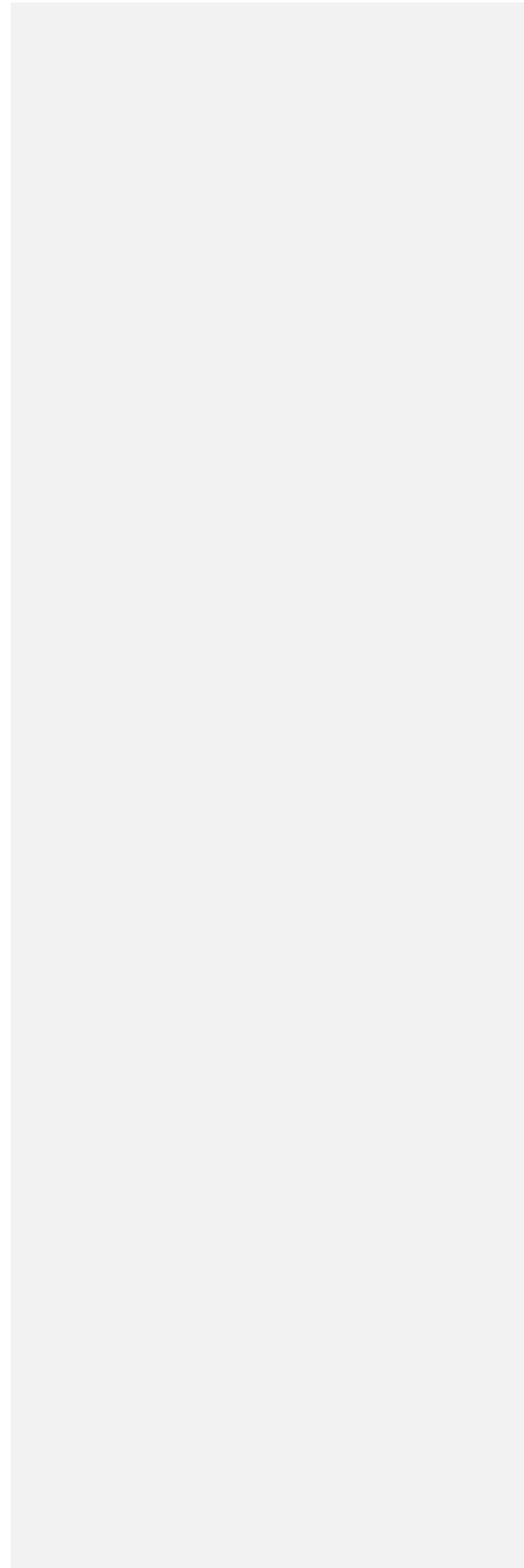
through these reactions, different *-parts* of you inside are [also actually](#) showing themselves ~~to~~ [you](#).

In the next chapter, we're going to learn more about these self-parts, and how they appear when old trauma activates.

### **<ah>Key Points**

- ~~<begin bulleted list>~~The PVT explains how trauma impacts the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which has two key branches to support us—in both everyday life and during overwhelming situations: the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS) and the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). When facing threat, these two branches activate three main defenses: social engagement, fight-or-flight, and freeze-shutdown.
- If social engagement or fight-or-flight succeed in eliminating a threat, the nervous system has completed its defense cycle and can return to balance—with limited chance of long-term post-traumatic issues. When escape is impossible, the nervous system activates freeze-shutdown, an automatic last-resort survival defense from the deep brain and nervous system.
- Unfinished defense cycles (unsuccessful or undischarged social engagement or fight-or-flight chemistry) leave emotional and physical energy stuck in the nervous system. This can fuel ongoing trauma symptoms.
- Immobility paired with safety (like being swaddled or lovingly embraced) can strengthen nervous system regulation, but immobility paired with fear can become toxic to a [young and](#) developing nervous system.

- Healing requires remobilizing and completing old defense cycles. [This also is an important part of healing beyond](#) , ~~rather than relying on time,~~ logic, [insights,](#) behavior change, or talk therapy alone. <end bulleted list>



## <cn>Chapter 4

### <ct>The Structural Dissociation Model <cs>Why Your Post-Trauma Reactions Make Sense

#### <begin story><sth>Tracy's Story

Tracy, a forty-two-year-old woman, came to therapy because, for much of her life, she'd noticed some behaviors that were beginning to spiral out of control. Tracy drove herself to perfection in everything she did, including tasks that didn't require intense effort. As a result, she was often sought out to take on extra projects, fix others' mistakes, or be the voice of reason when friends needed help.

Despite all the praise and rewards for her efforts, Tracy's inner voice would criticize her relentlessly. Tracy felt like a fraud who would soon be found out and "dropped like a bad habit" by everyone. Even when she learned to set boundaries or say no, Tracy felt compelled to sense what others wanted from her. And while trying to fall asleep each night, Tracy analyzed the things she'd said throughout the day. She believed she was nothing more than a bundle of social gaffes.

Even though Tracy knew her thoughts were irrational, and she'd gained many tools to calm these behaviors, she still couldn't stop this debilitating cycle or make sense of why it kept happening in her life. Tracy was finally burning out.<end story>

When I meet with new therapy clients, they often tell me about unwanted or dysfunctional thoughts, feelings, or behavior patterns they can't seem to overcome. Yes, they've learned some insights and tools that, for a time, do help. Or they've employed their own brand of coping, including keeping busy, taking on others' problems, using substances to calm down, or over-seeking support from others. But despite all this, old impulses reemerge, creating confusion,

frustration, and a sense of defeat.

What's really going on here? Why do these old patterns continue, and why can't our tools and strategies alone finally make them end?

One of the most illuminating things I've learned as a therapist is a user-friendly model that helps this make sense. This model shows why our old reactions continue despite new insights and resources, or the passage of time.

This is the structural dissociation model (SDM) of trauma, and it might offer illumination to you too.

### <ah>The Structural Dissociation Model of Trauma

The SDM was originally developed by world-renowned trauma experts Ellert Nijenhuis, Onno van der Hart, and Kathy Steele (2004, 2006)—and it has been enhanced by Dr. Janina Fisher (2010, 2017) and her colleagues over the years. This important model gives us invaluable insight into trauma's lingering effects on the brain and nervous system.

Although it has complexities (that we'll explore later in this book), essentially, the SDM tells us that important parts of the brain and nervous system develop well when we're fortunate to grow up in a home with unconditional love; safety; healthy and consistent parenting; good boundaries and appropriate discipline; real apologies when needed; and where we are seen, heard, and generally delighted in for who we truly really are. In other words, we grow ~~to~~ up experiencing others and the world as generally kind, trustworthy, and safe. This helps us develop solid emotional regulation, comfort being seen, a curiosity to explore, and an ability to share and receive. We learn to engage in self-reflection, critical thinking, and good judgment. We can take on goals and navigate different challenges (independently and with support), and we can feel safe being curious about our stuck points struggles, while seeking proper support for

Commented [JW6]: AQ: Is this in the reference list?

growth. Through this, we learn to care about ourselves and others, experience empathy, and build good connections with safe people. Finally, we don't just experience these abilities once in a while; they're how we respond to a lot of life (Fisher 2017; van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 2006; Schore 2003; Siegel 2020).

When we have these abilities, it means we've developed a healthy nervous system state called the *window of tolerance*—a state that grows over the first twenty-five years of life (Fisher 2017; Siegel 2020; Siegel and Bryson 2011). This state is vital because it holds really important social-engagement abilities to help us build a balanced life (Porges 2011; Schore 2003; Siegel 2013).

The SDM also shows what can happen when these important experiences aren't offered to a growing child—or if trauma, abuse, or lack of proper support ~~are also being experienced~~ [are also happening to her](#). Here, the child's window of tolerance (and its related brain and body functioning) can't develop as it should. Instead, something called *structural dissociation* takes over—~~here,~~ parts of ~~the~~ [her](#) personality and nervous system split off ~~—and they go rogue—~~, now becoming preoccupied with danger (all the things that could hurt ~~us~~ [her](#) physically or emotionally), self-protection (intense reactions to keep this from happening), and survival (getting through ~~life day to day~~ [life each day](#)). ~~Here~~ [Now](#), difficult, ~~and often~~ [or](#) problematic; ways of managing life ~~can often~~ become ~~our~~ [the](#) norm: frequent anxiety, anger, perfectionism, and hyper-independence, as well as avoidance, addiction, high dependence, or dissociation, to name a few (Fisher 2017; Levine 2010; Maté and Maté 2022; Porges 2011; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014). In fact, this focus on threat can become a way of life—while any real sense of security feels out of reach.

## <ah>The Brilliance of the Nervous System

When you think about it, this is actually brilliant...even deeply admirable. Our nervous system keeps a detailed record of all our unhealed hurts and lack of support, and now activates protective responses whenever something—even subtly—resembles an old trauma. Over time, this becomes so automatic that there’s no pause to wonder if this ~~such~~ level of protection is still needed. Our unhealed trauma has made the world feel unsafe, causing a focus on self-protection to become our new baseline. This means we now:

- *Avoid* anything that looks, even remotely, like the original trauma we endured
- *Defensively respond* to anything that looks, even remotely, like the original trauma we endured if it can’t be avoided
- *Strategize* in whatever ways possible to get what we didn’t in childhood—and from a world that has come to feel generally hostile or neglectful to us

## <begin story><sth>Tracy’s Story, Continued

At the beginning of the chapter, you met Tracy. Recall that Tracy was struggling with perfectionism, frequent hypervigilance to others’ expectations, intense self-criticism, random bouts of anger, and a fear of rejection and abandonment.

When Tracy described her family growing up, she reported that her father was a chronic alcoholic. Although he wasn’t overtly abusive, he often lost jobs or squandered the family’s money. Because Tracy’s mother worked hard to keep the peace, she compensated by working overtime to pay the bills. With her parents largely absent, Tracy was in charge of managing her own life and that of her younger brother’s. Tracy made their meals, organized their homework, and completed their morning and bedtime routines.

When Tracy turned ten, a young man in the neighborhood named Michael befriended her. Over time, Michael began to groom Tracy, making her feel seen, special, and finally understood. He offered money and gifts to her and her brother, and helped Tracy with chores assigned by her ~~mother~~ ~~mom~~. Within three months, Michael began sexually abusing Tracy, something that happened over the next three years.

Because her father was preoccupied with drinking and her mother was busy keeping the family afloat, Tracy didn't feel she could tell them about the abuse for fear of causing further family stress. As well, Tracy was feeling ~~deeply~~ ~~really~~ confused—she liked Michael's ability to make her feel special, ~~while-but~~ ~~worried~~ ~~adhering-to~~ ~~about~~ his ~~strict~~ rule that their “love” remain private.

After describing this picture of her early childhood, Tracy had a wise insight: “It's like parts of me are still waiting for the next loss, or the next betrayal, or the next let down, or even more abuse. Even though I know better, it's like parts of me are soldiers still fighting a war that's over.” Tracy was exactly right.<end story>

### <ah>We All Have Parts

Have you ever said to someone, “A part of me feels...” or “A part of me wants to...” or “I logically know what I should do, but there's a part of me that...”? You've probably also heard those around you use phrases like this too. In fact, we humans talk about the different parts of ourselves a lot more than we might realize. What's important to know is that we all have these parts of self—sometimes called “ego states” (Watkins and Watkins 1997). They're very normal, have their own nervous system activity, and are necessary to help us throughout life (Anderson 2021; Fisher 2017; Schwartz and Sweezy 2019; Schwartz 2021).

What do we mean by *parts of self*, and why do these develop inside? Well, it goes

without saying that life is pretty complex—it's a multifaceted system requiring us to have different roles, responses, and specialized ~~functions~~skills. Just like a successful business needs different departments with ~~various~~a variety of personalities and skill sets, or a healthy family needs different hierarchies and roles to manage important tasks, our inner world also needs specialized parts to manage ~~our~~the different aspects of our life.

As you can see, talking about our inner parts isn't just a metaphor or some idiomatic turn of phrase. In fact, many therapy approaches, including the SDM, emphasize working with these normal self-parts. ~~This~~This work helps us better understand ourselves and our reactions—that ~~activate from our different parts after~~especially aftera trauma. It also helps parts continue to grow if their development was neglected or stunted during childhood.

### <ah>Our Three States and Their Parts

In chapter 3, we explored the polyvagal theory of trauma and how our nervous system meets life through three different states: social engagement (in our window of tolerance state), fight-or-flight (in our hyper-arousal state), and freeze-shutdown (in our hypo-arousal state). We also learned that while the social engagement state helps us feel safe and grounded (enough) to deal with everyday life and its challenges, our fight-or-flight and freeze-shutdown states can activate to help us ~~when facing~~during a real (or perceived) threat.

Now, here's where the SDM and PVT come together. Within each of these three nervous system states, there are different *categories* of self-parts that help us in different ways. And within each of these categories, there are *specific* self-parts that we can learn how to talk to and work with for healing.

I know this sounds like a lot, but bear with me here. A diagram later in the chapter will help you put this together.

## <bh>The Engager Parts

When our nervous system activates our window of tolerance, we have access to a category of parts I call our *engager parts*. There are *two* types of engager parts:

- <begin bulleted list>*The adult self*: a mature part of self that helps us navigate and manage the different needs of day-to-day life. Our adult self helps us relate well to ourselves and others, while appropriately navigating life's needs and challenges.
- *The core self*: a very authentic part of self that offers instinct and wisdom, complex maturity and love, and a ~~drive~~ [desire](#) for meaning and purpose [in life](#).<end bulleted list>

## <bh>The Protector Parts

When our nervous system moves into either a hyper-arousal (fight-or-flight) or a hypo-arousal (freeze-shutdown) state, a category of self-parts known as our *protector parts* activate. Protector parts help us defend against threat, escape danger, or access hard-to-reach resources (Nijenhuis, van der Hart, and Steele 2006; Fisher 2017; Schwartz 2021; Schwarz et al. 2017).

There are *five* specific types of protector parts (we met some of these in chapter 3):

- <begin bulleted list>*Fight* gives us power and strength to fight off a threat.
- *Flight* gives us power and strength to flee from a threat.
- *Freeze* helps us numb, dissociate, or stay still and ~~noncombative~~ [non-resistant](#) to [endure-get through](#) (or survive) ~~and a~~ threat [we can't escape that we're facing](#).
- *Submit* helps us [people-please](#), caretake, or rescue others for belonging, [needed](#) resources, or to keep things [calm and](#) peaceful.
- *Please-see-me* ensures we get noticed and care-taken when feeling [highly highly](#) vulnerable, incapable, or [really](#) alone.<end bulleted list>

## <bh>The Child Parts

Both the hypo-arousal and window of tolerance states house a category of parts called our *child parts* (Nijenhuis, van der Hart, and Steele 2006; Fisher 2017; Schwartz 2021). There are two types of child parts: the *wounded child* (Bradshaw 1990), and the one I call the *waiting child*:

- <begin bulleted list>The wounded child holds our raw trauma-based hurts and tough memories that remain unhealed in our nervous system.
- The waiting child holds all our unmet wants, needs, and normal child-like impulses, hoping one day these can finally be met.<end bulleted list>

Below is a chart integrating the above information (a color version of this chart also is available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>). You can review this chart often to better recognize your parts, while building a framework for upcoming exercises.

[[Insert fig 2 here. Engager and Protector Parts chart: child only: please convert the image to black and white.]]

Commented [JS7]: is this correct?

[[Insert fig 3 here. Child Parts: please convert the image to black and white.]]

## <ah>A New Normal After Trauma

After ~~we've you've~~ gone through an ~~frightening or~~ overwhelming experience (~~once or repeatedly~~)(s), ~~over-reactive~~ defaulting to self-protection is not a sign that ~~we're you're~~ broken. In fact, as renowned trauma expert Gabor Maté (2022) asserts, these are normal reactions to very abnormal experiences. I couldn't agree more! That's because the human nervous system isn't designed to go through repeated or deeply overwhelming experiences—particularly during that

critical period of childhood (Siegel 2020; Teicher and Samson 2016; Schore 2001; Maté and Maté 2022).

Despite this, there are those in the world who will perpetrate their pain and aberrant impulses on the vulnerable among us—including children. When this happens, if the child has limited support, her nervous system will learn to structurally dissociate—her child parts will hurt, her protector parts will activate, and her engager parts’ development will go underground. And, this can continue well into adulthood if she can’t successfully remobilize and heal.

### **<bh>Analyzing Tracy’s Story: Symptoms vs. Adaptations**

When Tracy entered therapy, she initially talked about her many “symptoms.” She reported that a previous therapist had diagnosed her with generalized anxiety disorder. Tracy wondered if her frequent fixation with her body was a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder, while also characterizing her perfectionism and “imposter syndrome” as symptoms of a “low self-esteem problem.” Tracy even wondered if her periodic bouts of anger were a symptom of premenstrual dysphoric disorder.

Although it’s important to be properly assessed by a skilled and qualified professional, Tracy was invited to also consider these experiences from another angle.

Upon ~~reexamination~~re-examination, Tracy explained that her anxiety first started when she entered grade one. Because Tracy endured early family trauma, she described herself as always desperate to belong. Tracy strived to be liked by all of her peers, especially the popular girls in her class. She pleased all her teachers, was seen as a helper, and diligently strived for a “perfect” appearance. Tracy always pushed herself for straight A’s ~~on tests~~, while “flying under the radar” to avoid any “drama”.

Tracy talked about her struggle trusting most men, and her ongoing issue with all forms

of intimacy. Tracy also had episodes of “really intense” anger that would result in her “raging over the smallest things.” Even when her people forgave her for these moments, intense guilt pushed Tracy to “regain their love” anyway.

Reconsidering these “symptoms” in the context of post-traumatic self-protection, Tracy now wondered if:

- <begin bulleted list>Being hypervigilant to what others wanted, and then submitting to their expectations, protected Tracy from being ~~forgotten undervalued, forgotten,~~ or neglected the way she had been by her parents.
- Anxiety and perfectionism (including body fixation) helped ~~keep~~ Tracy stay focused and motivated. This —ensuring she’d never be seen as average, ~~or~~ dispensable, or forgettable. With this, Tracy felt protected from rejection ~~and abandonment~~, another common experience of her childhood.
- Perfectionism and the results that it gave ~~her~~ Tracy helped ~~Tracy~~ her to feel there was something special in about her. Because ~~feeling she always felt~~ unremarkable to her parents ~~was a daily experience~~, perfectionism ~~gave her a way to feel she helped~~ Tracy to feel ~~was~~ unique.
- As a child, when Tracy did feel special, it was often by her abuser, Michael. Tracy now wondered if ~~her~~ striving for perfection put control of feeling special back in her own hands.
- Intense anger episodes may have helped Tracy’s well-being because these offered a discharge of suppressed neurochemistry. She also admitted this anger felt powerful with its message that Tracy was “~~no longer~~ not to be messed with.”<end bulleted list>

\_\_\_\_\_ Tracy knew that ~~what drove~~ these reactions needed healing, and ~~that they~~ weren't a free pass to behave in hurtful ways. But Tracy ~~now considered that these~~ now saw these as helpful coping mechanisms, not just as ~~reactions may not be~~ pathology or ~~a~~ resistance to change. ~~Maybe they.~~ They also gave hints that Tracy's nervous system still saw the world as dismissive, unsafe, and self-serving.

Formatted: Space Before: 0 pt, After: 0 pt, Line spacing: Double

~~showed that Tracy's nervous system still saw the world as dismissive, self-serving, and generally unsafe. Tracy was curious about what healing could bring her, so her hurting child and protector parts might experience some rest.~~

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0 cm

### **<bh>Learning the Language of Trauma**

As we've learned, during trauma, deep and primitive parts of the brain and nervous system automatically activate and take over. It's not a conscious choice—it's our biology protecting us in whatever ways it deems necessary. We've also learned that because these survival mechanisms activate from the deep brain and nervous system, they *don't use the language of* ~~logic~~ words, ~~words~~ insights, or updated time. Therefore, despite good intentions, more left-brain (logic-based) approaches can't always reach these still-traumatized parts (Fisher 2017; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2026; Levine 2020; van der Kolk 2014).

Therefore, although very helpful, healing complex trauma needs more than storytelling, new insights understandings, or cognitive-behavioral strategies. We must also learn a new and unique language—that speaks to *the lower right brain and nervous system* (Levine 1997 2010; Ogden and Fisher 2015; van der Kolk 2014).

### **<begin exercise><exh>Meeting Your Parts**

Before we explore this new nervous system language, let's first spend some time getting

to know your inner parts. This can help you make sense of some of your reactions, while showing your parts we're getting ready to hear them.

Let's begin by noticing who's present inside—a process we can dub “role call.” By giving your parts some well-paced attention, we can begin some initial connection and trust. This will also help as we move forward with [some](#) ~~the~~ healing exercises to come.

*Your practice:*

**Settle in.** Find a comfortable place where you won't be disturbed. You can close your eyes or hold a gentle gaze. You can do this in silence or with music you find soothing.

**Recall each category.** Refer to the parts charts earlier in this chapter, or their color versions at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>. ~~You can simply~~ [You can](#) review your three nervous system states and their three categories of parts we're going to explore: engager parts, protector parts, and child parts.

**Focusing in.** Choose one of the parts categories to work with, whichever you wish—you can do this with conscious ~~thought~~ [choice](#) or just notice which you're drawn to.

**Finding a symbol.** Find or create *a symbol to represent one of the parts* in your chosen category (e.g., your fight part from the protector parts category, your waiting child from the child parts category, your adult self in the engager parts category, and so on). You can use whatever [mediums](#) you like (e.g., drawings, photos, pictures from the internet, crafts, or specific objects). Here, you're just exploring what it's like to work with one part more concretely and tangibly.

Your symbol can be elaborate, simple, or abstract. Whichever feels best to represent it just now.

**Journaling.** Once you've established your chosen part's object, reflect on this exercise in your journal. The following prompts will guide you [with this](#)—you're welcome to ~~can~~ reflect on (at least) three:

- <begin bulleted list>What parts category did you choose to work with, and what seemed to attract you to this?
- What specific part within that category did you choose to work with, and what seemed to attract you to this?
- Is this a part of yourself you're familiar with or a part that confuses or frustrates you? How so?
- How do you notice this part's role in your life now? In which situations? With which people? How often does it seem to activate? What methods of help does it tend to offer you?
- Did this part also show up in your childhood? Or not? Are you glad it did or didn't? How so?
- How did you feel being [\(a little\)](#) more connected with this part ~~through this exercise~~? How does your logical brain make sense of this self-part? How does your deeper nervous system feel about this part?<end bulleted list><end exercise>

### <ah>Key Points

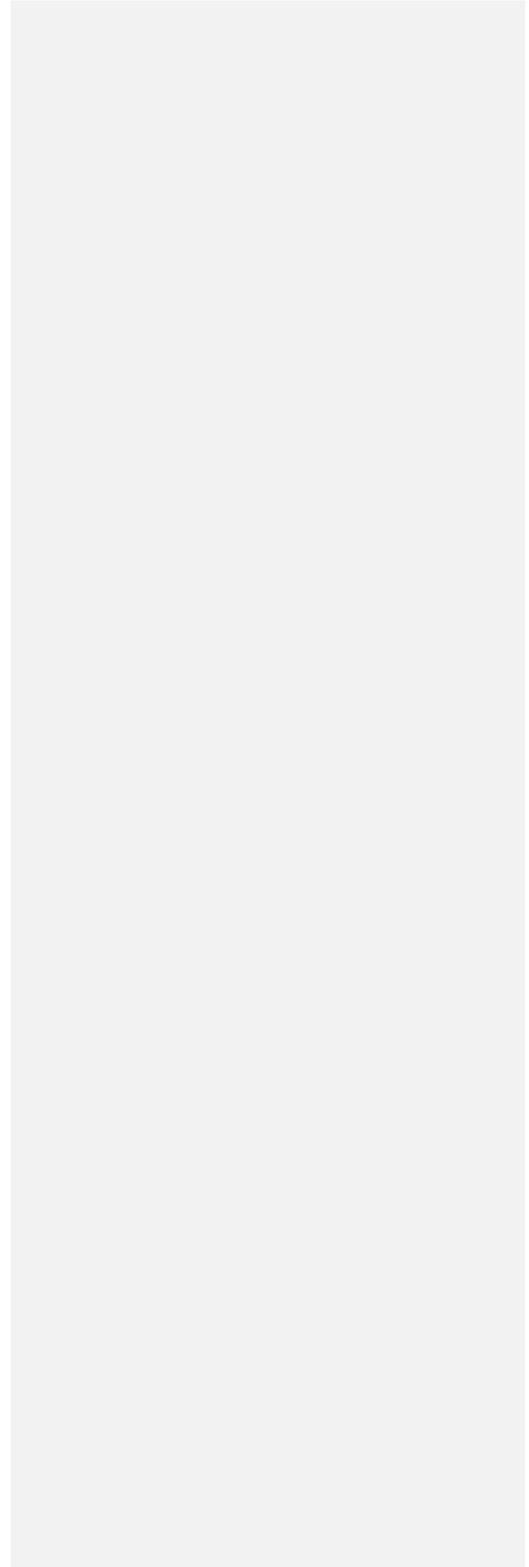
- <begin bulleted list>In safe and supportive childhoods, during the first twenty-five years of life, the nervous system develops capacities for emotional and physical regulation, curiosity, empathy, and connection—in other words, a solid window of tolerance with social engagement abilities. ~~Trauma, neglect, or abuse~~[Sexual trauma and neglect](#) can disrupt this, creating ~~alternative~~-structural dissociation and [intense alternative](#)-coping strategies—~~with a~~[here](#), ~~heavy presence of~~child and protector parts [begin to activate](#) even during moments ~~of true~~[that are safe](#)-safety.<end bulleted list>

- ~~The~~ Our nervous system's protective mechanisms are creative, intelligent, and can quickly ~~activate~~ show up whenever a physical or emotional threat (real or imaged) is suspected.
- Everyone has these different self-parts ~~of self that~~ to manage ~~the~~ different needs ~~of~~ throughout life. ~~These are normal and stay with us throughout life. These~~ Three categories of parts align with three ANS states:
  - ~~<begin bulleted list within a list>~~Window of tolerance—PSNS—social engagement abilities: Engager parts include the adult self (responsible, task-oriented, and balanced) and the core self (authentic, wise, and purpose-seeking).
  - Hyper-arousal—SNS—fight-or-flight abilities: Protector parts activate through fight, flight, freeze, submit, or please-see-me ~~responses to real or perceived threat~~ defenses when threat (real or perceived) is suspected.
  - Hypo-arousal—PSNS—freeze-shutdown abilities and window of tolerance-PSNS-social engagement abilities: Child parts include the wounded child (holding our raw, unhealed pain) and the waiting child (longing for incomplete needs, wants, ~~and connective~~ connection, and playful impulses to finally be allowed).~~<end bulleted list within a list><end bulleted list>~~



**<pn>Part 2**

**<pt>Your Parts, Their Roles, and Beginning to Connect**



## <cn>Chapter 5

### <ct>Your Protector Parts <cs>Fight, Flight, Freeze-Shutdown, Submit, and Please-See-Me

~~As we learn more about our different parts inside, we'll explore them in the order women usually notice them. As we dive deeper into parts exploration, we'll explore them in order of accessibility.~~

~~The ~~Because the methods used by our *protector parts* often~~ tend become problematic over time. ~~they~~ They're often ~~tend to be the~~ the first category of self-parts ~~that first to get our attention~~ get noticed. (In fact, it's often because of these parts that we first consider therapy.) ~~and are usually why we enter therapy.~~ So, in this chapter, we're going to get to know your protector parts a little bit better. ~~Under protectors lie your core self. Child parts, the most vulnerable, are typically the hardest to reach.~~~~

~~Because the methods used by our *protector parts* often become problematic over time, they tend to be the first category of self-parts to get our attention. (In fact, it's often because of these parts that we first consider therapy.) So, in this chapter, we're going to get to know your protector parts a little better.~~ But first, let's start with a quick review, and then learn about something called *neuroception*.

As you learned in chapter 4, after inescapable trauma, it's vital ~~to we~~ receive proper support ~~and healing~~. This allows us to feel ~~heard and~~ validated, ~~and remobilize a defense cycle, reducing our chances of post-traumatic issues, and remobilize stuck defenses.~~

However, if left alone with this ~~stuck~~, unhealed trauma, ~~our~~ ~~the~~ nervous system will cope by reshaping its functioning. We ~~will now then~~ respond to (even ordinary) life from a state of overprotection—especially if the trauma happened ~~in~~ ~~during~~ that critical period of childhood

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

(Fisher 2017; Ogden and Fisher 2015; Levine 1997, 2010; Schore 2001; Siegel 2020; [van der Kolk 2014](#)).

A significant consequence of unhealed trauma is a change in something called our *neuroception*. Neuroception is our brain and body’s safety sensor that decides if something is safe, benign, or threatening (Dana 2018; Porges 2011). When well developed, our neuroception tags things accurately, cuing us to respond in the most fitting way. But after unhealed trauma, especially during childhood, our neuroception’s functioning can become impaired. It can become too sensitive, seeing potential threat everywhere, or not sensitive enough, leaving us numb to true danger (Porges 2011, 2017; Dana 2018). Here, life becomes like Goldilocks’s porridge—too hot or too cold but rarely just right.

[[Insert fig 4 Nervous System Speeds. Please convert image to black and white.]]

### <begin story><sth>Too Hot: Imani’s Story

Imani grew up in a neighborhood where every corner felt familiar—fun-loving kids, lots of animals, and kind and friendly neighbours. But when Imani turned nine, this neighborhood developed into a landscape of hidden terrors for her. Two older teen boys began abusing Imani under a shroud of secrecy and threat. Not only did this wound Imani’s body and mind, ~~but~~ it reshaped how her neuroception ~~now now~~ read the world. Instead of ~~feeling~~-~~expecting~~ kindness and safety, her neuroception ~~expected~~-~~anticipated~~ cruelty and control. Everyday things were tagged ~~dangerous and overpowering~~as ~~potential threats~~, so deep hypervigilance became Imani’s response. And because her family was not good with emotion, Imani had to deal with this all on her own.

As Imani grew older and the abuse finally ended, the aftershocks of trauma continued to show. Imani’s neuroception now signaled her to be ready for the next intimidation ~~and-or~~ hurtful

Commented [JW8]: AQ: I added this date because it was missing. Is it correct?

Commented [JS9R8]: yes :)

betrayal. A stranger's lingering gaze would trigger high alert while Imani's body ~~remained~~was always tense and braced.

More subtly, Imani's impaired neuroception routinely saw danger in her different relationships. ~~More subtly, Imani's impaired neuroception routinely saw danger in her different relationships.~~ A slight change in tone or delayed ~~response to a text~~ response was flagged as impending rejection and hurt. ~~.~~ Even when she knew these fears were illogical, Imani's body awaited more abandonment and loss. Imani's life was ~~was now still~~ based in fear despite having ~~having good~~ tools to help her ~~to cope.~~ <end story>

#### <begin story><sth>Too Cold: Pam's Story

Pam had a brother who was five years older. David, known as the neighborhood bully, began to abuse Pam at home. At first, he emotionally tormented Pam, calling her horrible names and degrading her looks. But as Pam got older, David began sexually abusing her, leading to a series of nighttime assaults.

Because David was bigger and stronger, because the assaults happened when their parents were asleep, and because her brother made serious threats if she told, Pam's only defense was to now immobilize. Moreover, Pam's neuroception noticed David's increased aggression whenever Pam tried to fight or escape. Therefore, Pam's freeze-shutdown ~~response was a vital~~ response ~~helped~~ to temper more vicious assaults from happening.

Pam's home life offered her little protection. Her parents were dismissive and emotionally selfish. They drank and fought frequently, creating a hostile homelife. And they were always too distracted to notice Pam's pain or abuse. With such limited options, Pam's nervous system now entered a state of constant disconnection. Unless drunk or ~~,~~ high, or feeling pain through self-harming, Pam no longer felt much inside. As ~~her~~ the numbness took hold,

~~Pam's~~ Pam's neuroception abilities ~~ability to sense danger~~ ~~also~~ ~~also~~ ~~became~~ ~~now~~ faded and dulled. Over time, she was known as being too trusting, often missing red flags for "poor choices" in life.

In reality, Pam's ~~nervous system~~ ~~got~~ ~~system~~ ~~got~~ early training in how to dismiss ~~true~~ ~~danger signals~~ ~~signals for danger~~ (or to endure danger through stillness and numbing). This left Pam vulnerable to toxic relationships, ~~and~~ staying in jobs with abusive bosses and coworkers. Even in friendships, Pam often connected with those who exploited her ~~generous~~ ~~"easy-going"~~ nature. Ironically, the immobility that helped Pam survive now blinded her neuroception to the red flags she needed. <end story>

Neuroception is such an important brain function because it alerts us whenever a threat is nearby. When our neuroception senses threat—real or imagined—it then signals a protector part ~~inside us~~ to activate ~~to help us~~—fight, flight, freeze-shutdown, submit, or please-see-me (Anderson, Sweezy, and Schwartz 2017; Fisher 2017; Porges 2011). This relationship between neuroception and our protector parts is natural—and ~~it~~ plays a key role in ~~how we~~ ~~our~~ responses ~~in our lives~~ ~~after trauma~~.

Finally, healthy neuroception is important because it lets us know when to *approach something good*—a nice experience, a positive person or relationship, or a good opportunity that fits ~~well~~ for us. ~~Without~~ ~~But,~~ ~~without these~~ signals for true safety ~~in life~~, we no longer ~~feel safe to~~ engage. Instead, we meet life with distrust and self-protection, ~~and different defenses that now~~ ~~limit us~~.

#### <begin text box><tbh>A Simple Analogy

The built-in carbon monoxide (CO) alarm in your home is similar to your neuroception function.

When a CO detector reads safe levels of oxygen, we move about our homes with calm and ease. However, when dangerous levels of gas are detected, it sounds an alarm, prompting life-saving action. Similarly, when neuroception accurately assesses our safety, we feel trust to engage what life has to offer. But, when neuroception flags a potential threat, it triggers our nervous system to ~~withdrawal or defend~~defend or withdrawal. It will prompt us to respond with quick self-protection—activating one or more of our protector parts.<end text box>

### <ah>Our Five Protector Parts

Every person I've counseled knows just how much I respect our five protector parts. These parts inside are always on the clock, available whenever our neuroception signals them. Our protectors, along with their brain and body chemistry, have a vital job throughout our life—to keep us safe, ~~to~~ help us cope, and to get us what we need to survive. Moreover, they do this with an intense fierceness and loyalty, using specific tools and methods unique to each. ~~So, whenever our neuroception tags something as threatening, one or more protector parts immediately kick in—often before we can even think about it.~~

Let's take a closer look at how each ~~of these five~~protector part specifically helps us.

### <bh>Fight Protector

Fight's primary job is to keep us—or others important to our life—safe. And its tools include various forms of action that always involve *intensity and speed*.

Our fight part can use the following tools and methods: Intense frustration and anger; physical or verbal aggression; argumentativeness; frequent fault-finding and complaining; frequent opposition; hypervigilance; worry and anxiety; panic; high defensiveness; sanctimony;

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

arrogance; distrust of others; guardedness; high self-reliance; and avoidance of appearing vulnerable. Racing thoughts; compulsive planning; perfectionism; overworking; [being over responsible or](#) taking over for others; heavy determination or pushing through; high rigidity and adherence to rules or routines; obsessiveness, compulsiveness, or difficulty letting things go. A strong need to understand and quickly make sense of things; intense passions; urgency to solve problems; a constant sense of pressure. High control of oneself or another; suicidal thoughts or actions (Fisher 2017; Fisher 2021; Schwartz 2021; van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 2006).

#### **<bh>Flight Protector**

Flight has a very important purpose in our life—*aiding escape* from physical or emotional threats.

Our flight part can use the following tools and methods: Physically withdrawing or escaping from people, places, or situations; running away; chronic avoidance of difficult feelings; quickly or frequently cutting off relationships; procrastination; blocking commitments; abdicating responsibilities. Rationalizing things away; dismissiveness; denial; apathy. Excessive daydreaming; overuse of screens or technology; bingeing on shows; frequent distraction from important tasks; overworking to avoid other aspects of life; burying oneself in “good” projects to avoid something painful. Sleeping too much; lethargy or disinterest in taking action. Binge eating; overuse of substances or partying; excessive shopping or spending; excessive sexual behavior; gambling (Fisher 2017; Fisher 2021; Schwartz 2021; van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 2006).

#### **<bh>Freeze-Shutdown Protector**

Our freeze-shutdown protector part is so important in our lives—it helps us *survive and*

*endure* the inescapable. It also helps to keep us immobilized so harm can be minimized and over ~~faster~~ [more quickly](#).

Our freeze-shutdown part can use the following tools and methods: Frequent emotional numbing; feeling disconnected from life, others, or oneself; zoning out; physical, emotional, or cognitive immobilization; chronic hopelessness; inner emptiness; limited energy. Discomfort being seen or noticed—either positively or negatively—with a strong urge to hide or be invisible. Dissociative experiences such as depersonalization (feeling disconnected from yourself or like you're watching yourself), derealization (feeling like the world is unreal, dreamlike, or distant), leaving the body (Fisher 2017; Fisher 2021; Schwartz 2021; van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 2006).

#### **<bh>Submit Protector**

Submit helps us to *please and appease* ([Walker 2013](#)) if confrontation or resistance could cause harm or loss. Our submit response likes to avoid problems by seeking approval or by rescuing others. It can activate when we need emotional ~~safety, physical~~ [or physical](#) safety, belonging and acceptance, a reduction in chaos and a need for peace; or important resources that seem hard to access.

Our submit part can use the following tools and methods: People-pleasing; placating; over-focusing on others' expectations, desires, or needs; trying to predict or manage what others want; consistently putting others first; fixing or rescuing behaviors; striving to be liked by everyone. Avoiding boundary-setting; not saying no; always saying yes; not speaking your truth; swallowing true feelings like anger or resentment; tolerating bad behavior; feeling overly responsible; taking the blame for others; irrational self-blame, guilt, or shame (Fisher 2017; Fisher 2021; van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 2006; [Walker 2013](#)).

### <bh>Please-See-Me Protector

The please-see-me protector part seeks *connection and care*. Its main function is to compel others to notice what we need. This behavior can stem from early life stages when attachment to our caregivers was our main form of support. In adulthood, this part can activate when we feel neglected, invisible, overwhelmed, or helpless.

Our please-see-me part can use the following tools and methods: Activation of “needy” feelings and behaviors; frequent crying or intense emotional expression; frequent connection-seeking; regularly (over-) sharing problems with others; attention seeking in various forms; intense self-focus; feeling powerless or helpless; feeling easily forgotten, misunderstood, or victimized; feeling discomfort when alone. Sensitivity to rejection, boundaries, or hearing no; dramatizing or overreacting to compel a response from others; fantasies of being adored or rescued; strong self-orientation and focus on unmet needs. Aversion to self-soothing or self-reliance; feeling childlike and highly dependent (Fisher 2011, 2017, 2021; Ogden and Fisher 2015; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006).

It’s important to know that we all have protector parts...and we need [each of](#) them throughout [our of](#) life! They’re vital when we encounter true danger; or, when in a pinch, we need something we can’t ~~seem to get otherwise~~[access](#). But these parts become ~~an issue~~[a problem](#) when their heavy-hitting methods activate too often or too intensely for us. They’re also problematic when they block us from responding with healthier ~~strategies~~[actions](#) in situations we can handle.

### <ah>Faulty Neuroception

When biphasic arousal (reactions to life that are too hot or too cold) becomes our norm, it

can feel like we've lost control of our life. Our neuroception's faulty assessment of events can now create feelings of confusion and self-distrust. Life begins to feel like a constant effort, ~~and~~ that it's passing us by y... instead of ~~our~~ truly living it.

Living in overprotection mode causes obvious issues: strained relationships, distrust and anxiety, chronic stress, loss of certain experiences, loneliness, and emotional burnout—life comes to feel exhausting and meaningless. And while our protector parts activated only from good intention, we can no longer feel a true self inside—or a life with real balance, meaning, or ease.

#### <begin exercise><exh>Discovering Your Protector Parts

In this exercise, you're invited to explore which protector parts your nervous system seems to default to—during real or perceived threat. People often find that their nervous system leans toward one or two protector parts particularly—almost like a *protection personality style*. By recognizing your primary protectors, you might start to see patterns in your post-trauma reactions. This awareness can help you begin to consider where you might still over- and underreact.

*Your Practice:*

**Settle in.** Begin with two grounding or pacing exercises of your choice from chapter 2.

**Review the tools of each protector part above.** Consider which ones resonate most with you. Is there one protector part that shows up more often in your life? Perhaps two parts that seem to tag team and work together? Do people ever offer feedback that seems to point to one or two of these protector parts in your life?

**Self-reflection.** Choose at least two of the following prompts to explore in your journal:

- Which protector part(s) do you notice in your life? Which ones might others have noticed in you?
- Reflect on a recent situation where you felt stressed, insecure, anxious, or threatened (to a mild or strong degree). Which protector part came forward to help you? What tools did it use? How did that feel? What was the outcome?
- Did this level of protection seem truly necessary for ~~the~~that situation? Was there a real threat or danger that required this type of protection? Might a more regulated part of you have handled it differently? How so?
- How do your protector parts influence your relationships? ~~Think about how your~~How ~~do your~~ protector parts ~~shows~~ up in your interactions ~~with others~~. Does ~~it~~this create too much distance or too much closeness with people (or them to you)? What are the benefits and struggles this protection style creates?
- What situations seem to trigger your protector part(s) ~~the~~most? Are there certain environments, people, circumstances, or stressors that activate your protector part(s) more quickly than you'd like? What patterns do you notice, and where might these stem from?
- How might life be different if one of your protector parts took a step back? What might you like about this idea? What scares you about this idea? Does this feel safe to explore at this stage of your healing? Does it somehow feel risky to ~~use more~~respond ~~using more~~ regulated parts of yourself ~~to respond~~? How so?

**Close.** Complete this exercise with one or two grounding or pacing exercises from chapter 2.

## <ah>Imagining Life Without So Much Self-Protection

Unless we're [actively still](#)-living in emotional or physical danger, our protector parts are not meant to lead our daily lives. As the PVT reminds us, we are *also* wired for connection—that [is 's](#)-safe, fulfilling, and rooted in health. It's actually deeply human to seek out safe others to create and enjoy moments that matter. It's also vital that we connect to our true selves (not just our protective parts), and with a sense of presence, comfort, and a healthy environment. Nature designed us not just for survival but for belonging, security, meaning, and purpose. Therefore, secure connection—and its gift of social engagement—is not just a luxury. It's what makes life worth living.

As women become acquainted with their self-protection style, a gentle curiosity begins to awaken: *What lies beyond this? How can I begin to better assess true safety and threat? And perhaps most of all—What might [more-safer](#) social engagement look like for me?*

## <begin story><sth>Gemma's Story

After an adolescence of sexual assaults by her mother's boyfriend, Gemma lived [her](#) adult life from intense hypervigilance. She always feared her partner would leave her, while bracing for her friends' eventual disloyalty. At work Gemma would imagine endless worst-case scenarios while constantly second-guessing her own inner knowing. Gemma was fueled by a fear of more hurt, so her loyal protector parts were always on alert.

Deep down, Gemma knew she longed for something different. She fantasized about feeling safer and more engaged. She wanted more days where she could trust herself better, and believe in the people she'd brought into her life.

As Gemma talked more about this possibility, she imagined the way this just might look:

Instead of shrinking back from her partner's affection, she'd lean into receiving his warmth and his caring. Conversations with others would feel more relaxed, with more fun and less pressure to look good and perform. To Gemma the world would feel less harsh and fickle, with no invisible audience critiquing her constantly.

With a growing sense of safety, Gemma ~~might~~ could feel ~~more~~ spontaneous, with a bit of curiosity about ~~the~~ things she might like. She could better assess the true motives of people, and set chosen boundaries without aggression or fear. And Gemma could finally have a relationship with herself, making space to explore what mattered most to her. "It would be like the world saying, 'It's okay. Take your time. There's lots of safety and patience for you here.'"

Finally, as Gemma reflected on her loyal protector parts—that had worked so hard to help her survive—she liked the idea that she had *other* parts too, available, capable, and waiting to lean forward. Unlike ~~the~~ her protectors, these parts were not built to just guard and react or cope and endure. They were designed to reach out, to connect, and make meaning, ~~and to~~ giving give Gemma ~~true~~ moments of security and ease.

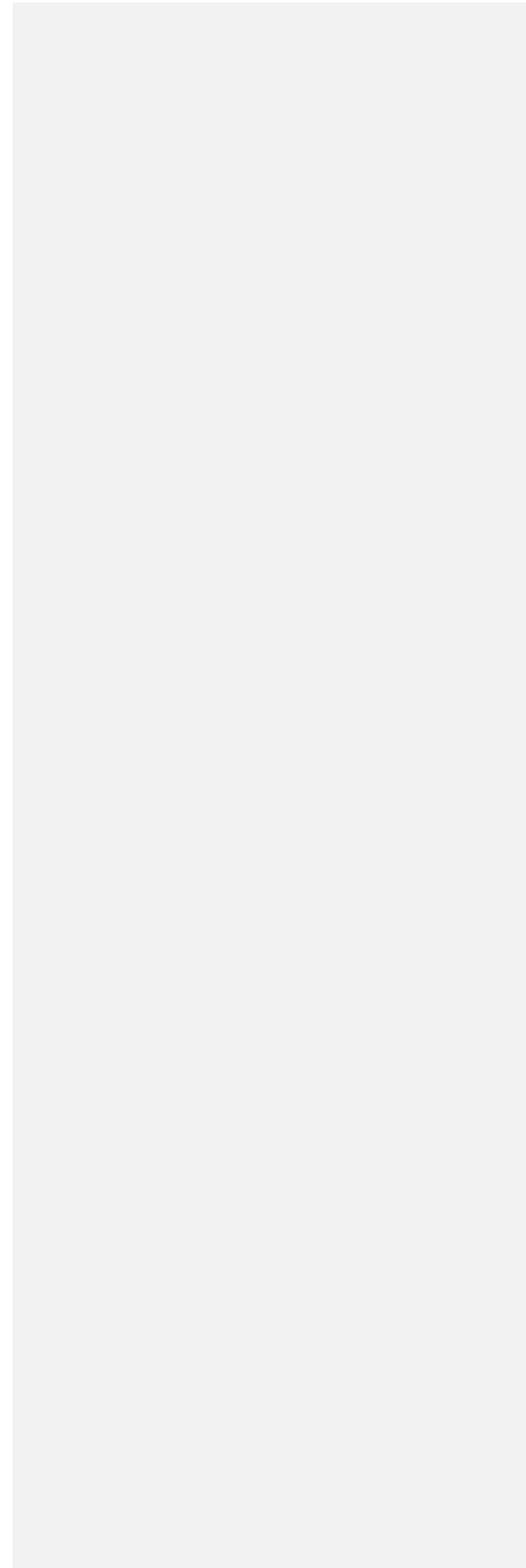
These were her engager parts, and they could help Gemma build a life of mobility, that was more ~~of~~ her own.<end story>

### <ah>Key Points

- <begin bulleted list>Our nervous system has five protector parts with their own brain and body functioning: fight, flight, freeze-shutdown, submit, and please-see-me.
- Neuroception is the body's built-in safety detector system—constantly scanning for cues of safety and threat. After unhealed CSA, protector parts are always vigilant, ready to step in for us when threat is (accurately or incorrectly) perceived. After trauma, especially during the critical stage of childhood development, neuroception can become

impaired—either too hot (seeing danger everywhere) or too cold (missing real danger cues).

- Life with a lot of unnecessary self-protection strategies makes it difficult to: access healthy connection, feel security and ease, or have a meaningful sense of self or authenticity. Access to our engager parts—designed for relationships, purpose, and joy—becomes overshadowed by fear and disconnection.<end bulleted list>



## <cn>Chapter 6

### <ct>Your Engager Parts <cs>Adult and Core Selves

In the last chapter, we saw how unhealed CSA can rewire your nervous system for high self-protection—even long after the trauma is over, and even when life has become safe again. Women sometimes ask, “Isn’t it actually better to remember the pain and stay in protection mode? Doesn’t that lower my potential of ever being hurt again?”

This is a very understandable question, especially from someone who’s gone through so much. But here’s the thing—neuropsychologists are pretty clear that when the brain learns to focus on pain and self-protection, this can prevent other important parts of the nervous system from developing (Fisher 2017; Levine 2010; Porges 2011; Schore 2009; Siegel 2020). In other words, when your protector parts take over—especially in situations that don’t need their intense methods—other parts of you, and their related nervous system functioning, can’t grow and come online. Therefore, even if you want to experience presence, curiosity, and safe connection, you’ll still feel anxious, reactive, avoidant, or shut down. Your protector parts continue to commandeer your life—and you start to feel like they’re all you’ve got. That is unhealed trauma.

What are these *other* parts of you inside that let you live a life *beyond trauma*? I call them the *engager parts*. And even if you’ve rarely felt them, they’re still available to you inside. In fact, science now shows that reclaiming these parts isn’t just possible—it’s a vital part of healing and [living-creating](#) a healthier life. (Dana 2018; Fisher 2017; Schwarz et al. 2017; Schwartz and Sweezy 2019).

### <ah>The Adult Self and Core Self

Inside our window of tolerance nervous system state lives the category of self-parts I call

the engagers. This state and its parts give us emotional and physical regulation, safe connection with ourselves and others, [paced](#) curiosity, and a more meaningful presence with life.

In this category there are two specific engager parts:

*The adult self*: a functional, grounded, and mature part of self that can engage, think clearly, use good judgment and planning, and effectively manage life's different tasks and demands (Fisher 2017; Schmidt 2012; Schwartz 2021; Steele 2006).

*The core self*: the deeper, authentic, and timeless essence of you that brings wisdom, love and compassion, creativity and inspiration, and inherent worth and purpose to life (Maté 2003, 2008; Schmidt 2012; Schwartz 2021; Schwarz et al. 2017; Steele 2020).

In many ways, it's these two engager parts—your adult and core selves—that brought you to this book. They carry a quiet knowing that life can hold more for you than fear and self-[protection](#)[defense](#). They also know that you are deserving of the security, meaning, and gentle joys they can connect you with.

Let's take a closer look at each of these parts.

### **What Is the Adult Self?**

Your adult self is an important engager part because it helps you navigate life with presence and balance. Think of your adult self as a competent inner parent, or a stable and capable internal friend. This part can reasonably assess and implement what life needs from you, such as healthy judgment, appropriate communication, and effective decision-making. It's the part of yourself that keeps you organized and centered, while navigating relationships with good people who fit you. Your inner adult offers you self-reflection and good insight so you can assess

what you need, ~~or~~ [and](#) grow from mistakes. The maturity of this part helps you find your right pacing, feel present and grounded (enough), and navigate ~~even~~ tough situations.

### <begin story><sth>Aisling's Adult Self

At thirty-six, Aisling came to therapy feeling constantly “overwhelmed by people.” In her marriage, she was often resentful and bitter. She was increasingly overwhelmed by her kids’ needs and meltdowns. And because she routinely dismissed her own needs, Aisling’s pressure would build until she’d explode with anger, then “neediness.” Although she really did want better connections, she just couldn’t shake this “hair trigger” overwhelm.

Although she grew up in a stable single-parent home, Aisling suffered CSA at ages six and eleven—each time by someone outside of her family. Aisling feared telling anyone, including her “emotionally tough” parents. So, she hid the abuse until age nineteen, when she decided to tell her best friend, Brigid. Not knowing what to say, Brigid told Aisling to forget it, that “it wasn’t really healthy to overthink the past.” Aisling wished it were that simple, and feeling totally invalidated, vowed to never again disclose the abuse—until therapy.

In her sessions, Aisling came to see that her nervous system was stuck in protection mode, and discovered just how much she truly distrusted people. She also noticed how often isolation overtook her, making her feel like a lonely, needful child. Aisling’s fight and please-see-me protectors were working overtime, keeping her stuck in a cycle she called “fear-explode-shame.”

It was then that Aisling learned about the category of engager parts, specifically her adult part and the help it could bring. As she developed compassion for her loyal protectors, Aisling also became curious about her inner adult. Aisling liked the idea of reading people’s expectations more realistically, setting healthy boundaries without guilt or fear, properly sharing her needs

Commented [JW10]: AQ: Single parent since she grew up in a single-parent home?

with less distrust or shame, while being present and supportive when her children really needed her. More than anything, Aisling longed to feel relaxed and secure with the safer people she now had in her life.<end story>

### <bh>What Is the Core Self?

Your core self—sometimes called the wise self—is similar to your inner adult because it helps you stay grounded, form deeper relationships, draw on instinct and wisdom, and shape a life with meaning and purpose.

But your core self also offers you something more: a sense of wholeness inside that feels like the *real you*. It's a sense that you're more than your roles and achievements, and that you're naturally [\(and healthily\)](#) entitled and inherently worthy.

When you connect to your core self, you move beyond layers of protection and all of the ways you've had to cope and get through. Your core self is what lets you feel healthily deserving—to be seen, to be heard, and to take up safe space. It's knowing there has never been another person just like you—and that underneath the trauma your core self remains. As trauma expert Gabor Maté (2022) clearly asserts, even after trauma there is nothing fundamentally wrong with you. Yes, you may carry scars and types of coping that now need tending and gentle transformation. But there's an essence at your core that remains *untouched* by trauma—it's intact and waiting to re-join you in your life.

I very much agree! And while for many this often feels brand new or hard to believe, it is the truth about you—and it is part of your birthright. Your core self cannot be stolen or destroyed, even on the hardest day of your life.

### <begin story><sth>Aisling's Core Self

Although still in progress, Aisling was feeling more connected to her adult self. She

better understood her triggers, was feeling greater permission to stick to new boundaries, used clearer communication, and was learning to pause to consider her options. Aisling was doing better—and she liked this sense of healthier control. But now she was noticing something else that was missing—a more meaningful connection to what she called her “true self.”

Aisling began wondering if her core self could guide truer passions—while engaging them with less urgency, ~~avoidance~~ [perfectionism](#), or doubt. She liked the idea that her core self’s creativity could try new things without the pressure of perfection. Aisling liked thinking she could be warm and compassionate both with herself and those she really loved. Maybe she could even face memories without panic, instead feeling soothed by a patient presence inside. Aisling wanted to feel more relaxation and fun, while being more playful with herself and her kids. Finally, Aisling was curious about her deep instinct and wisdom, especially during complex moments in life.

In therapy and between sessions, Aisling was building her relationship with her core self a bit more each day. Little by little, she was able to notice that this fundamental part of her was still alive inside. Over time Aisling integrated some of the gifts of her engager parts—and in a way that felt grounded and ~~well-paced~~ [well-paced](#) to her. She was surpassing a life of only pain and protection and starting to touch upon more lightness and mobility.

### **<ah>When Engager Parts Are Late Bloomers**

The adult and core selves aren’t just theoretical concepts—they have their own brain and body functioning too (Fisher 2017; Levine 1997; Porges 2011; Siegel 2020). Unlike other self-parts that are available from birth, engager parts—and their particular neurophysiology—need time to grow and mature (Blakemore 2018; Fisher 2017; Jensen and Ellis Nutt 2015; Siegel 2013). In fact, the brain’s prefrontal cortex and certain parts of the vagus nerve (both of which

help us access our engagers) are not fully developed until our mid-twenties (Giedd 2014; Neufeld 2017; Lenárd et al. 2004; Schore 1996; Siegel 2013). But for many, because of childhood trauma and neglect, these neurophysiological structures will have to develop in adulthood.

What is it, specifically, that grows our engager parts, and that window of tolerance state that houses them? Simply put, it's the good or "good enough" (Winnicott 1965) experiences our parents and caregivers give us from birth (Fisher 2017; Neufeld and Maté 2004; Schore 1996; Siegel 2020). In other words, these parts of ourself and their specific neurophysiology ~~grow~~ [develop](#) through: steady, consistent, and loving connection; feeling safely seen, heard, and understood for who we are; the proper meeting of our physical and emotional needs; and consistent and healthy boundaries and discipline (Fisher 2017; Perry and Szalavitz 2017; Porges 2011; Schore 2009; Schwartz 2021; Siegel 2012). We must experience positive attention, warmth and playfulness, proper attunement (feeling understood even if not agreed with), empathy, and mature and consistent guidance (Neufeld and Maté 2004; Schore 1994; Siegel and Bryson 2011; Winnicott 1965). And if we happen to experience trauma during childhood or adolescence, our safe grown-ups must believe us, gently and lovingly support us, and get us the right help to heal. ~~—so~~ [When this happens](#) our healthy self-development [can](#) ~~can properly~~ continue, [with problematic interruptions becoming less likely](#) (Fisher 2017; Maté and Maté 2022; Perry and Szalavitz 2017; Schore 2009; Siegel 2012). As you can see, our parents have a lot to do with ~~what~~ [the](#) parts of ~~oursel~~[ourselves](#)~~ves~~ we ~~can~~ access ~~later~~ in life.

What if your parents weren't available for you this way? What if they were struggling with their own unhealed trauma or emotional immaturity? Or what if they weren't capable of being properly there for you during or after the abuse?

Well, here's the good news: Your brain and nervous system can grow throughout life because of something experts call *neuroplasticity*. Neuroplasticity is a fancy term that means [the even-as-adults even in adulthood](#), we can grow our brain and nervous system (Doidge 2015; Fisher 2017; Maté and Maté 2022; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014). This process, sometimes called *developmental catch-up*, lets us finally [grow-grow](#) what we should have in childhood—solid connection and consistent access to our safe and mature adult and core selves.

### <bh>Parenting Your Brain and Nervous System

You may be asking yourself, *How do you actually do this—grow the neurophysiology for greater maturity and wisdom?* It's a [fair and vital-good and fair](#) question. Here is the answer:

[As-While we-we do the work of processing](#) our trauma, we [must also begin to reparent ourselves](#) also let our engager parts have some practice time [inside](#) (Bradshaw 1990; Fisher 2017; Schmidt 2012; Steele 2020; Whitfield 1987). [In other words, because these parts were overshadowed in childhood, they had limited practice taking the reins. Like children rehearsing their more grown-up skills, our engager parts want to show you their gifts. In other words, we offer ourselves those missing childhood experiences even though we're now adults.](#) This doesn't mean you'll need twenty-five years (like in childhood). But it does mean [specifie-some](#) practices can help [you these vital parts of you growgrow these parts](#) now.

— [Although we'll be discussing some how-tos later in the bookI, there is an-'s an](#) exercise below to [help](#) get you started.

It's really important to remember that growth doesn't happen right away, and reaching perfection is never the goal (even for actual parents currently [rearing-raising](#) young nervous systems!). I like to say that if your engager parts are active about 80 percent of the time, your inner and outer worlds should feel pretty functional.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

## <bh>A Five-Day Practice for Engager Parts

~~How do you begin to develop your adult and core selves? Although it can be very helpful to seek the support of a trained professional, you can start by using practices like the five-day process below.~~

To help maximize ~~your~~this practice you'll need a journal, nice pens or pencils, colored markers, different craft supplies if you wish, a quiet and comfortable space, calming music if you like, your phone or tablet for the instructions, and your earbuds if you prefer. During this exercise, you'll work with only one engager part at a time—either your adult or core self—for the full five days. You can repeat this exercise with your other engager part later if you wish.

*Your Practice:*

**Day 1—A symbol of your adult or core self.** When developing something new, certain parts of the brain learn better when we have a tangible or concrete item to keep us focused. Today's practice is about finding or creating a physical object to represent your adult or core self (whichever you are working with this week). This symbol will remind you that the seeds of this part are already within you, and that you are now in an active relationship-building process with it.

Today, consciously find or create something concrete that, for this week (and even beyond), will represent your adult or core self. For example, an object from nature, an image you find or create, a photo or small collage, a special token you own or buy, a meaningful piece of jewelry, or simply a color, a particular shape, even a word or description you write on a cue card. Whatever it is, take your time. This is important and meaningful work. (Again, make sure this object is something ~~you can hold in your hand~~you can physically hold, not something ~~only~~just imagined or viewed on a screen.

Once you have your object, go to your quiet space and do two grounding or pacing exercises from chapter 2. Next, just sit with this object (whether holding it, placing it close by, or even somewhere farther away in the room), and begin to feel its presence (a sense of its vibe or energy) in whatever way comes today. Take at least thirty seconds to do this (more if you like), then take a thirty second break. You can repeat this for at least three rounds. (Additional option: You can listen to a guided audio practice to enhance your connection-building with this object and the part of you it represents at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>.)

To support this connection, you can write your initial impressions in your journal using the following prompts. Choose at least two, and just allow yourself to go with this experience—logic or full understanding isn't required:

- What did you notice—feel, sense, or think—when you first found and then sat with this image or object? Did anything surprise you about your initial connection?
- If you had to describe the vibe of this engager part in just a few words, what would they be—steady, calm, present, strong, gentle, curious, wise? (Remember, engager parts are not about blocking. So, if you felt fear, trepidation, anger, shame, and so on, that is likely a protector part feeling wary about this exercise. But if ~~the~~-you gently asked the protector ~~stepped-to step~~ aside for a moment, what would you be able to sense from your engager part?)
- How does your engager part seem to feel toward you (or this process) today? Does it want to support, guide, comfort, or simply be with you? How do you know this—through words, it offers you, a presence about it, a sense in your body, or images it shows you?

- If this part could speak, what might it want you to know right now? What kind of encouragement, reminder, or wisdom might it offer you at this stage of your connection?
- Today you'll [also](#) decide the way you'll relate with your object when not actively doing this practice. Will you keep it in your pocket, next to your day planner, in your handbag, on your body, or somewhere with a little more distance for now? What might drive your decision for today?

**Day 2—Deciding the when and where.** Because your protector parts have likely been quite active in your life, ~~today you can let's~~ [begin to](#) consider when and where you'd like your engager part to be [a little](#) more present [in your life](#) ~~instead~~. In your journal, and with limited self-judgement, consider the following questions:

- ~~<begin bulleted list>~~In the last week (or two), in what situations have my protector parts come out?
- In the last week (or two), what specific methods have my protector parts used to try to help me?
- Were these protector parts needed for these situations? If yes, how so, and what were the outcomes? If no, how so, and what were the outcomes?
- How might my adult or core self (whichever you are working with this week) have handled one of these situations differently? What might this have looked like instead? (Be as specific as you can even if you're simply pondering this.)
- How might I have felt after my adult or core self handled that situation? How might I have felt a few hours or even days later?
- How might others have felt (or reacted) to the actions of my adult or core self in that situation?

- When a protector part takes over a situation that my engager part could handle, what's a respectful way I can ask my protector part to step for just now? <end bulleted list>

Please know that you don't have to try to make your adult or core self be really present just now. This exercise is simply for noticing, being curious, and imagining something different at this stage. That's all you need to do. Let's keep going—you're doing great.

**Day 3—Noticing your engager's speed.** Earlier in the book, we've talked about different nervous system speeds. For example, when protector parts are active, they often move at speeds that feel really fast (hyper-aroused) or pretty slow (hypo-aroused). This makes sense because, as we know, very ~~fast~~ fast and very slow speeds can help a lot in the face of true threat.

But as you're building connection with your adult and core selves, you'll notice that they move at speeds very different from hyper- and hypo-arousal—because engagers' speed is about balance, presence, and steadiness. Our window of tolerance state ([where they live](#)) is about regulation.

When protector parts have been our default for a (long) time, our brain and body can get used to *their* speeds. So at first, a more moderate pace can feel boring, confusing, or even unsettling or unsafe ~~in some way~~ (even if this doesn't logically make sense). As you start to connect with your adult or core self, you'll be training your nervous system to adjust to new pacing—and that more balanced speeds can be safe and okay.

For today's exercise, please visit <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132> to download the “nervous system speeds” chart, and access the ten-minute guided audio practice to work with engager part speeds. Then, after this practice, choose at least three of the following and reflect in your journal:

- <begin bulleted list>What was my body and nervous system's reaction to today's practice? Did it feel calming and better, uncomfortable in some way, or a mix of both? Please explain.
- Did noticing and experimenting with a different nervous system speed create anxious feelings, confusion, or even distraction or shutdown? Be as specific as you can.
- Can I imagine becoming more comfortable with the balanced inner speeds of my adult or core self? How so, or why not just yet?
- How might the more balanced speed of my adult or core self help me in day-to-day life? List three potential ways and explain each to whatever degree you can.
- Write a little note to yourself that shows some gratitude or pride for actively experimenting with this different speed today. Keep it where you can see it for the remainder of this practice week.

**Days 4 and 5—Practicing adult or core self skills.** As you gradually build more connection with your adult or core self (whichever you are working with this week), you may want to practice some of the specific abilities and experiences this part offers. Because there are many, let's start by choosing five, and then experiment with two of these today and tomorrow. (At <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>, there is a helpful download with a list of specific engager skills [to](#) reference.)

- <begin bulleted list>From the list, choose any five abilities of your adult or core self (whichever one you're working with this week) that appeal to you just now. In your journal, list the five you've chosen.
- Of these five, now choose and circle the two that you are most interested in exploring at this stage in your healing (even if you're not sure why).

- Now, choose one to work with today (or tomorrow depending on when you start this part of the exercise) and one to work with tomorrow (or the next day). Please know that you don't have to use these skills in any kind of complex or well-developed way. This is just about experimenting with two adult or core self abilities, along with their related nervous system speed.
- In your journal, choose one page for today's skill and one page for tomorrow's skill. Under the first skill, describe how it might look to use this specific skill in real time. For example: Where might you use it, in what situation, and with whom? What specific words might you say, what particular action might this skill invite you to take, and what nervous system speed might you feel when using it? To help with this, imagine you're watching a mental movie of your adult or core self activating this skill for you. Then, simply describe what you see using the questions above.
- Practice this skill (even briefly) at just one point ~~in the~~today day-using ~~your~~the above description ~~as your guide~~above to guide you. Again, this doesn't have to be perfect—at all. This is just about gently connecting and experimenting with the feel, speed, and ability of your adult or core self.
- Afterward, or at the end of the day ~~today~~, in your journal, write about your experience. Use the prompts below from a place of observation and curiosity—without heavy critiquing or self-judgment. This is the normal process of learning. You're simply gathering information to notice and help you proceed. Choose at least three of the following:
  - <begin bulleted list within a list>How easy or difficult was this for me?

- Did using this skill of my chosen engager part activate any fear, concern, or resistance for me?
- Did any of my protector parts want to activate to help to any degree? If yes, how did I notice this? When the protector stepped forward to take over, how did I respond? Did this feel okay?
- Did I feel less or more seen by others when using this skill of my engager part? What emotion(s) or sensation(s) did this create inside? Where do I remember feeling these in my body? How tolerable were they today?
- What felt okay enough to make me want to experiment with this engager skill again?
- What might need a little tweaking in using this engager skill another time?
- How do I feel about myself having experimented with this today?<end bulleted list within a list>

Tomorrow, repeat this exercise for the second skill you chose, beginning with describing how it might look as you use it.<end bulleted list>

Engaging in this five-day practice—in the way that feels right for now—is an important step toward your healing and growth. Your adult and core selves have been waiting to join you and take their rightful place in your life. As you strengthen your relationship through patience and good practice, you'll be doing a lot more than just moving beyond survival. As your engager parts strengthen, they'll ~~also~~ become allies in your healing, ~~+~~bringing the compassion, tolerance, and wisdom you'll need.

The other important thing about our adult and core selves is that they can offer our hurt child parts what they've been missing for so long. These children inside have carried raw pain

and unmet needs, and in a way that's unfiltered; they dutifully ~~carry~~hold ~~all~~ our hard truths. With no choice, they've held trauma too big for a child—but they had to, because nothing else was available. Therefore, the important abilities that your engager parts offer are the very things that were unavailable during your childhood. It's these grown-up parts that can finally help these wounded and waiting children inside.

In the next chapter, we'll learn more about your inner child parts and the gentle rescue they've been awaiting.

#### **Key Points**

- Overprotection is one core feature of unhealed trauma. Protectors take over while engager parts stay overshadowed—keeping them from activating and more fully developing.
- The two main engager parts are the adult self (grounded, paced, mature, and capable of solid emotional and social skills) and the core self (authentic, wise, meaningful, and inherently worthy and lovable). Engager parts not only help us live life more fully, but they also offer conditions for healing after trauma (e.g., compassion for parts, connection with good resources, healthy insight, planning next steps, better emotional tolerance and pacing).
- Engager parts may seem distant or absent, but their neurophysiology can continue to grow even well into adulthood—through proper and consistent acknowledgement and healing practices.

## <cn>Chapter 7

### <ct>Your Child Parts <cs>The Wounded Child and the Waiting Child

In this part of the book, we've explored three main categories of self-parts—each with its own set of tools and gifts for navigating life: protector parts, engager parts, and now the equally important child parts. Although our engager and protector parts tend to be most noticeable in our daily life, it's often the pain and unmet needs of our child parts that keep us stuck after CSA (Bradshaw 1990; Fisher 2017; Schwartz 2021; Schmidt 2009; Steele 2020; Whitfield 1987).

In this chapter, we'll focus on two types of child parts: the *wounded child* and the *waiting child*. Though frequently avoided or suppressed because of their intensity, these parts are not passive remnants of the past. They are alive behind the scenes, holding important ~~records~~truths: what happened to us, what never got to happen for us, and what still longs to be completed.

Meeting When we meet these child parts with patience and; understanding, ~~—~~ and the learn the particular language they speak ~~—we helps can finally see and validate their needs, loosen blocks~~ to their healing which then helps our other parts get healing too ~~—while also rebalancing how our~~ other self parts can now show up in our lives.

Formatted: Font: Italic

#### <ah>How Child Parts Get Triggered

Before we learn more about the wounded and waiting child, I'd like to pause and offer some important context. When our child parts trigger it's by fear—especially when vital needs feels threatened or lost. Therefore, understanding this can be really important (and help with healing) because it lets you meet these inner children with more clarity and compassion.

Formatted: Font: Not Bold

The fears of wounded and waiting child parts can be triggered by many things, some that are obvious—but some that are (logically) small or harmless. What often matters isn't the reality of the triggering situation, but whether it feels meaningful to our child parts inside.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

\_\_\_\_\_ In my experience, we humans have *four core fears*—that are particularly tender after a childhood of trauma: *loneliness, powerlessness, lack of access to essential resources, and annihilation*. These may sound intense, but they really are very human and can show up a lot in our everyday life. And, understanding this matters because our repeating distress is rarely just about a present-day situation. Here, one of our core fears has likely also activated—something that then provokes our sore child parts.

\_\_\_\_\_ The first core fear is *loneliness*—triggered by experiences of perceived loss, dismissal, rejection, or some type of abandonment (big or small). This can also be triggered when we feel different than others, misunderstood, invisible, or unworthy to belong.

\_\_\_\_\_ The second core fear is *powerlessness* or *loss of control*—triggered when options feel gone and there's no way to change this. Even when we logically understand this differently, our child parts might still feel forever trapped or immobilized.

\_\_\_\_\_ The third core fear is *lack of access to essential resources*—those needed for our physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being. This can be triggered when a child part feels a meaningful absence, unreliability, or some kind of unfairness.

\_\_\_\_\_ The fourth core fear is *annihilation*—a fear of being erased or made non-existent either physically, emotionally, spiritually, or at the level of one's sense of self. This fear can be triggered by aggressive situations feeling we could be engulfed and disappearing completely (Kernberg 1975; Mahler 1975; Winnicott 1965). Even when we know this may not be logical, it can feel deeply real to a traumatized child inside.

~~Let's take a closer look.~~

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

### <ah>The Wounded Child: Keeper of Pain and Truth

Both during and after CSA, our wounded child part can show up a lot. It's the part of us

that feels deeply alone, terrified, confused, small, and powerless. It carries raw feelings that haven't been seen, truly understood, or properly processed. Often, ~~these~~ the feelings of our wounded child part get quickly overshadowed by our dutiful protectors—~~they~~ these race ~~to the~~ to rescue so we ~~don't~~ don't have ~~really~~ to feel the level ~~level of~~ of vulnerability these child parts carry (Anderson 2021; Fisher 2017; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Schwartz 2021).

### <begin story><sth>Kaley's Wounded Child Part

Kaley, a thirty-seven-year-old nurse, was repeatedly sexually abused by her grandfather. Before therapy, Kaley routinely dissociated, especially during moments of intimacy with her wife. ~~Sudden movements or shifts in another~~ Gentle affection person's or another person's caring mood made Kaley's whole body stiffen and ~~braae~~ recoil. ~~In~~ Even in staff meetings, ~~she~~ she would freeze and go blank ~~even when~~ especially when being given given positive feedback. Kaley always felt like an exhausted imposter, "a little girl pretending to be a ~~competent~~ confident grown-up."

Kaley sought therapy because of frequent child-like reactions: falling apart when overwhelmed, lashing out in different ways when challenged, and needing the TV on at night to fall asleep. She ~~felt~~ was perpetually overwhelmed by a world ~~that~~ she described as ~~often~~ always ~~felt~~ feeling "too big and too much."

Kaley's child parts still carried trauma memories—visual and body memories that were rooted in fear. Despite being an adult, Kaley's system was ~~on~~ on high alert, lost in a time when she was powerless to abuse. Kaley ~~now~~ finally wanted more freedom for herself—so it was time to gently meet her wounded child parts.<end story>

## <ah>The Waiting Child: Keeper of Longing and Hope

Unlike the wounded child, the part I call the waiting child does not primarily carry pain. Instead, this part lives in expectation. It keeps dutiful track of our losses and needs in hopes that one day these can finally be met: a protective adult to tell; a clear acknowledgment of the trauma's impact; loving, [balanced](#) and effective support; and being truly seen and known beyond the abuse. The waiting child holds all our lost justice and never forgets what should have been.

## <begin story><sth>Kaley's Waiting Child Part

With healing, Kaley understood why she often felt like an overwhelmed kid. While her wounded child [part](#) made sense [to her](#), discovering her waiting child [part](#) surprised her. With support, Kaley noticed how this part kept track of her losses and longings. It also explained why she fantasized about being rescued, rooted for justice on crime shows, volunteered to save neglected animals, and dreamed of a future very different from the present. Her waiting child believed justice could prevail and that her rightful life and identity was still possible—[a](#) And it was willing to wait as long as needed.

In learning about these parts of herself, Kaley understood a difficult truth: These child parts couldn't be healed by proxy. Rescuing others—or having others (or her protector parts) rescue her—couldn't substitute for tending to her own child parts within. Real healing had to happen through Kaley herself, guided by the truths that these children carried (Bradshaw 1990; Fisher 2017; Whitfield 1987). Although deeply unfair, Kaley was learning that this ~~is-is~~ [picking](#) [picking](#) up the pieces [left-after childhood by-CSA](#) [abuse](#).

## **<ah>How Child Parts Show Up**

——Wounded and waiting child parts can show up in both obvious and subtle ways—often when we’re triggered by (real or imagined threat of) *loneliness, powerlessness, or loss*. However, far from being dysfunctional, this can actually be very helpful. Because once we learn how to properly listen, our child parts can show us what’s unfinished inside.

### **<bh>Recognizing the Wounded Child**

The wounded child holds the truth of our past harms. Emotionally, she may show up as deep sorrow, grief, [deep](#) loneliness, emptiness, toxic shame, powerlessness, raw fear or terror, and a hopelessness that anything can change. She doesn’t have balanced strategies or inherent defenses; she [simply](#) lives in pure insecurity and pain. Bodily signs of this inner child part can include heaviness; aches; feeling physically small; a sense of being “dirty” or contaminated; childlike postures; a hollow gut; ~~fear of being seen~~[feeling very exposed](#); ~~needing to always be seen~~[feeling non-existent](#); and a deep vulnerability. These experiences aren’t chosen—and they need more than disdain, suppression, or even different coping tools. They need recognition, compassion, and trauma-informed healing (Fisher 2017; Levin 2010; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; van der Kolk 2014). That’s because this brave child part carries our “weight.”

### **<bh>Recognizing the Waiting Child**

The waiting child clings to hope: to be seen, heard, believed and understood, helped, delighted in, and loved just for who she is. She longs to play and to finally experience safety, curiosity, dreams, and real [and healthy](#) connection. [So, s](#)She may show up as deep longing or endless expectation. ~~This~~[She](#) ~~child~~ is also present when we come alive through lightness,

Formatted: Font: Not Bold

movement, adventure, silliness and fun. This inner child needs proper healing—because this brave child part carries our “wait.”

### <bh>Noticing the Child Before Protectors Swoop In

When child parts appear, they do so with raw honesty. They bring unfiltered truths—*important clues*—to what still needs healing. But our protector parts read this pain and longing differently—as something threatening that must be eliminated. So, our protectors swoop in with their different tools and methods, completely overshadowing the child’s message to us (Fisher 2017; Schwartz 2021). Over time, we can miss or even forget that these children (and their brain and body circuitry) are still alive inside.

It’s vital to catch ~~the-the~~ truths of ~~our-our~~ child parts before our protectors ~~parts~~ shield ~~this-us old-pain-from these~~. Therefore, a task of healing is recognizing, then widening, an important space that I call *the gap*: that brief space *after a-the child’s pain-part* is triggered, but *also before* self-protection ~~quickly~~ takes over.

### <begin story><sth>Sarika’s Story

Sarika struggled to visit her parents’ house. Their relationship was okay—but Sarika always felt anxious and nauseous driving up their road. Before having kids, she avoided this discomfort by hosting her parents outside of their home. But because her children wanted to visit this house, an old pain ~~began-was now~~ resurfacing for Sarika.

In therapy, Sarika had begun to explore sexual abuse by her ~~grade-4~~ *fourth-grade* teacher. ~~At this time~~ *Back then*, Sarika was struggling with math, so her teacher had offered her private tutoring. Sessions began after school in the classroom, but soon the teacher suggested Sarika’s

Formatted: Font: Italic

home—specifically their quiet basement rec room. During the fourth session, the teacher abused Sarika, something that continued the next two sessions.

During the abuse, Sarika’s nervous system activated submit and freeze-shutdown to help her get through it. After session six, she refused further tutoring; and pleased with her grades, her parents agreed. At school Sarika stayed near peers and safe adults, avoiding the teacher as best as she could.

Because her parents deeply respected authority, Sarika never told them about her trauma. She “eventually moved on,” logically knowing the abuse was wrong and not her fault. But now as she revisited the place where it happened, that moment *after* triggering was becoming important: that gap between when her child parts’ ~~stirring~~-stirred (shock, powerless, shame, dread) and her ~~her~~ protector’s activated methods ~~-parts’ methods to deal with~~ to shield her ~~-that pain~~ (hypervigilance, avoidance, and dissociating). This gap was a place for some ~~now a place for Sarika to offer herself some~~ unfinished healing.

Sarika ~~was recognizing~~ learned how her protector parts ~~stepped in~~ helped when her childhood pain was triggered during visits:

- Fight showed up with anxiety and panic to keep Sarika alert and on guard.
- Flight generated plans for escape—turning the car around or claiming illness to leave early.
- Submit used guilt to make Sarika commit to visits at her parents’ house because she’d promised her kids.
- Freeze-shutdown used dissociation and numbing to help Sarika tolerate these in-house visits.

- Please-see-me over-sought comfort from her family to soften Sarika’s emptiness once back home.<end bulleted list>

Sarika didn’t have an anxiety disorder, or a fear of commitment, or a needy personality. Her ~~protection-dutiful protectors were still mechanisms-were-quickly~~ swooping in, ~~blocking blocking~~ important Sarika’s ~~connection with still hurting child parts~~ connection to her childhood pain.<end story>

### <ah>How to Connect with Child Parts

~~To connect~~Before we begin to ~~with connect our~~ with your child parts, we need to begin it’s really important to start with some acknowledgments. First, we honor your ~~That’s~~ because your loyal protectors inside who have worked tirelessly to help ~~parts have minimize~~ your ~~hurt~~ worked very hard, for a long time, and always out of good intention. When you’ve felt at a loss, these dutiful efforts were so often what helped you keep managing life.

~~These dutiful parts~~But now we must also acknowledge these child parts, ~~that have have~~ held ~~carried~~hard, raw ~~pain and longing~~ truths—and, ~~and have done this for you~~ with great strength and bravery. And they’ve likely done this without much recognition, carrying a weight that no child should have to.

~~The~~ Your wounded child needs to hear that the abuse ~~was not~~ wasn’t her fault—that she really was powerless to a calculating perpetrator. She now needs her pain to be seen and ; ~~understood~~ heard, and with gentle ~~comforted with paced presence,~~ understanding, compassion, and ~~gentle compassion~~ presence.

~~The~~ As well, your waiting child needs to know that her longing has been vital—~~that that~~ it has kept a healing vision alive inside for you. She also needs permission to grieve what was lost, ~~and~~ and remind us ~~gently remind you~~ about what your life can still hold.

Commented [JS11]: Some inaccuracies here the parts works... so I fix them about p

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

A starting place for this is ~~creating-to create~~ a space of slowing: ~~ag space of~~, warmth, and ~~and patience~~ ~~patient exploration~~so exploration can begin. ~~It's~~ And it's asking the urgency of ~~the~~ protector parts to pause—to step back and “unblend” for a moment or two (Levine 2010). This allows ~~the-your~~ child parts ~~a little more~~ space, with ~~your dutiful~~ protectors standing by if truly needed.

Again, it cannot be overstated that having to do this may feel new, awkward, and ~~even~~ really unfair. Absolutely none of this was your fault, and yet you're the one who is left to repair it. And you're right about this. It is not fair!-. In fact, it's one of the saddest truths of ~~trauma~~ ~~healing~~trauma healing.

Having said that it's also important to carry *this* truth: With gentle, properly paced, and purposeful practice, healing can help you feel more in charge—of how *you* hold your past, how *you* get to feel ~~now~~, and where *you* might want your life to go ~~now~~. In other words, you—~~and~~ ~~your~~your adult and core self, and their powerful gifts—~~engager parts~~ can ~~now~~ (learn ~~how to to~~) ~~become more and more present in your adult life now—while giving-offer these sore children~~ ~~healing~~ ~~important healing to these brave children within~~ (Fisher 2017; Schwartz 2021; Schmidt 2009 2012; Steele 2020).

#### <begin exercise><exh>Connecting with Child Parts

The following exercise helps you begin ~~connecting-to connect~~ with either a wounded ~~child~~ or ~~a a~~-waiting child inside. This exercise is also available to you as a guided audio practice at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>. (If you carry a lot of pain or often dissociate, please do this practice with a trauma-informed clinician.)

To support ~~your good-proper~~ pacing, this exercise will ~~also-use~~ ~~the-a~~ practice ~~of~~called ~~pendulation~~—moving in and out of connection with ~~a an inner~~ child ~~so the dosing of this feels in~~

healthy and tolerable ~~doses~~ (Levine 1997, 2010). The goal here is to go slow and not rush ~~this process~~. ~~Remember~~ It's important to remember that, slower is faster.

*Your practice:*

**Choose the child part and its symbol.** Decide whether you'll work with a wounded or waiting child today. Then, find or create an object to represent this child—an item you own or buy, something from nature, a piece of jewelry, an image or drawing, a childhood photo or small collage, or even a word or phrase on a cue card. ~~Allow yourself to~~ You can take your time with this.

**Space, ground, pace.** Create a quiet and comfortable space. Then, place your chosen object somewhere that feels right—on your body, near you, or even across the room for now. Choose two grounding or pacing practices from chapter 2 to help your nervous system settle into the practice. Although you don't need to feel completely calm, a 7-out-of-10 presence is ~~important if doing this work on your own~~ a good benchmark.

**Attune to your child part.** Set a twelve-minute timer. With eyes closed or softly hazed, set an intention to connect with the child part you've chosen today. Begin to sense her presence, even if it feels far away or awkward. Let her know you just want to practice some very gentle connection today, and without analysis, judgment, or trying to make anything happen.

**Locate your child part.** Notice where this child part seems to be in this moment— ~~either~~ somewhere in or around your body. If that's difficult to notice, ~~imagine or~~, you can simply focus on the object that represents her today. ~~Because trust takes time, if~~ If protector methods activate (e.g., agitation, ~~heaviness~~, resistance, ~~fear~~, distraction, dissociation, and so on), know that that happens, and you can acknowledge them kindly: "I see you. I know you're just trying to

help. I'm building gentle connection with this child part inside. We'll go slowly; I promise. ~~P~~Please step back a bit just for now." Then return to the child.

**Guiding prompts.** Some helpful prompts you can use to help you include:

- ~~<begin bulleted list>~~When you attune to this child part, what's one thing that seems to get your attention—positive or uncomfortable?
- What sensations, emotions, images, or thoughts arise, even subtly?
- Does the child feel open or guarded today? What mood seems to be present?
- If this child had a body posture just now, what would it look like?
- What words would you like to offer this child? What words might she want to hear?  
What do you sense ~~that~~ she might want you to know?~~<end bulleted list>~~

**Grounding and pacing with the child.** If any uncomfortable feelings ~~rise~~ come up (especially above a 5 out of 10), you're welcome to ~~can slow~~ pause down and integrate a grounding or pacing practice from chapter 2 (e.g., toning the tone of the child's feelings, fire breath for releasing difficult sensations ~~you notice inside~~ (hers or a protector part's), heart-centered breaths for compassion toward this child, or a cocooning practice for rest and containment). ~~You can do this for a twenty- to forty-five-second round.~~

**Pendulating.** After connecting with this child for a twenty- to forty-five-second ~~s-connection with this child~~, gently ~~shift~~ pendulate (shift) your awareness back into the room—notice your breathing, a pleasant scent, the music you may be playing, or a ~~calm-pleasant (or benign)~~ body sensation even if it's small. ~~Be~~ Now be present with this for forty-five seconds, or as long as you need before returning back to the child.

**Repeat this process.** ~~Be with the~~ You can continue this process until you alarm sounds, or for as long as feels tolerable to you today. ~~or until the alarm sounds.~~

**Closing the practice.** Now slowly return to the present [time](#). Feel the support of the chair or floor beneath you, take a slow breath in and out, then slowly open your eyes. Take your time to reorient to the room, note today's date, your age, and your location. Choose two grounding practices to complete today's practice.

**Tucking-in for today.** Decide where the child's object belongs for now—kept with you, placed somewhere nearby, or tucked away safely for [todaynow](#). Let the child know this is not dismissal; it's a contained place to rest until you meet again.

**Journaling after the exercise.** Within a few hours of your practice, journal using three of the following prompts of your choosing:

- <begin bulleted list>Did connecting bring up memories or images you hadn't considered in a while?
- What emotions arose during or after the practice?
- ~~How-What~~ did ~~your-you~~ notice in body ~~during or feel~~ afterward ([emotions](#), [body sensations](#), [a posture](#), [an energy](#))?
- What specific or general thoughts did you notice during or after the practice today?
- Did working with this child change how you view your story ([or her place in it](#)) in any way?
- Which protector parts hovered nearby? What might have worried them? How did you respond [to them](#)?
- When might you connect with a child part again? What draws you to this practice?
- What hesitations also arise for you or a protector part regarding this practice?<end bulleted list><end exercise>

Healing isn't just about understanding your pain—it's also about connecting with the parts of you that have carried it. Your wounded and waiting child parts are not just echoes of the past; they're diligently holding some essential (even if painful) stories of your life. By [now](#) recognizing them, learning their language, and offering gentle but real space, you create a foundation for [your deeper-deeper](#) healing. [Although](#) ~~(This is-will not be~~ quick or linear. ~~However,~~ each thoughtful step really does change you inside—, beginning with some [really](#) important trust-building.

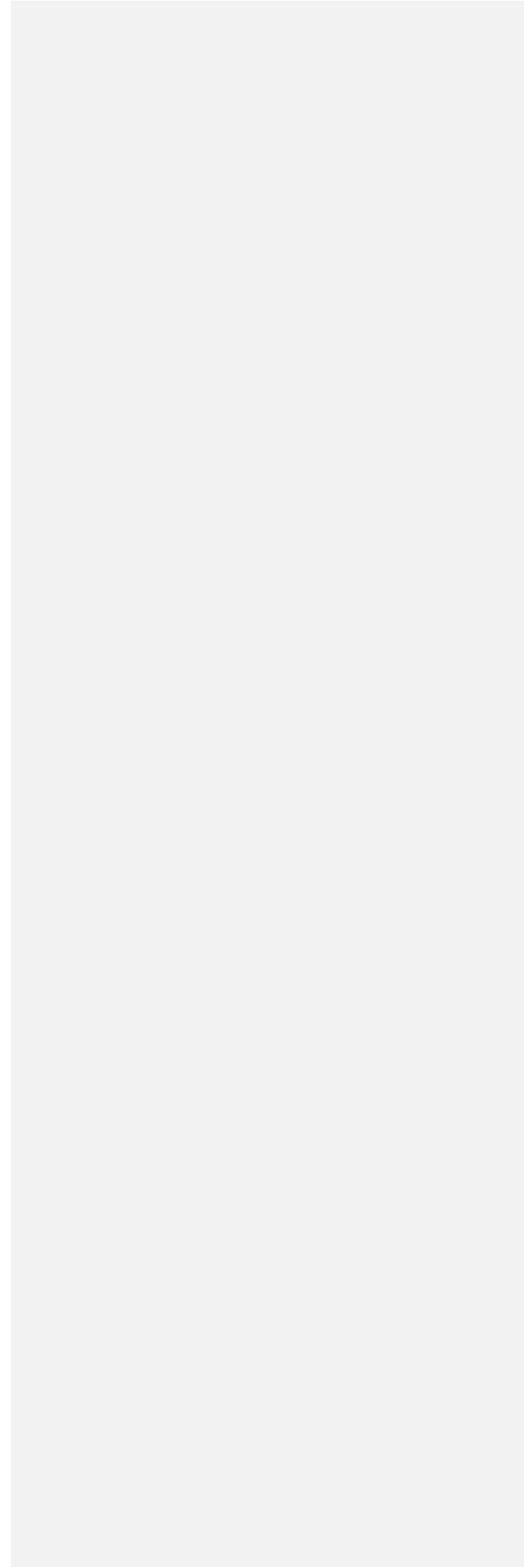
#### <ah>Key Points

- ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ <begin bulleted list>The pain and unmet needs of child parts often drive feeling stuck and fuel protector part activation.
- [Humans tend to have four core fears—loneliness, powerless, lack of access to essential resources, and annihilation. When triggered the pain of our child parts activates.](#)
- The wounded child holds the unfiltered truth of the past—raw fear, shame, grief, and powerlessness—which show up in emotions, images, sensations, and body cues. This child part needs recognition and compassion, not suppression or quick coping tools.
- The waiting child holds longing and unmet needs—safety, support, justice, being seen and known, fun and play—and lives in hope and expectancy. Grieving these longings, and being curious about options now, supports healing.
- Meeting child parts with patience and their specific language loosens blocks, calms protectors, strengthens engager parts, and shows us what still needs healing.
- Widening the gap between triggered child and protector parts lets you assess needed healing, not just [activate](#) quick self-protection.<end bulleted list>



**<pn>Part 3**

**<pt>Parts Work <ps>Building Your Relationship and Synthesizing the Healing**



## <cn>Chapter 8

### <ct>Learning the Unique Language of Your Nervous System

You're learning that the parts of the brain and nervous system most impacted by trauma work very differently than do the parts that use logic, self-reflection, planning, and conscious behavior choices. If only our deep hurts could heal by simply telling our story, developing better insight, and making new decisions. If only...

But this is often why trauma survivors still feel stuck even after doing good therapy—because specific parts of the brain and nervous system still haven't gotten the message—literally! Therefore, to more fully recover from childhood trauma, we *must* also work with the deeper nervous system—using the particular language *they-our parts* understand (Dana 2018; Fisher 2017; Lanius, Paulsen, and Corrigan 2014; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Schwartz and Sweezy 2019; van der Kolk 2014). One way to do this is through a tool called SIBAM.

#### <ah>SIBAM: The Language of the Right Brain and Embodied Nervous System

SIBAM (Levine 2010) is a tool that guides our work with the deeper, more rudimentary parts of the nervous system (where old trauma issues activate inside). SIBAM is an acronym where each letter represents a different way the nervous system processes our experiences—both ordinary and traumatic. The letters of SIBAM stand for *sensations, images, body and behaviors, affect, and meaning-making*. Let's take a closer look at each of these five elements.

#### <bh>Sensations

*Sensations* may be one of the most powerful ways to access, and then work with, a nervous system affected by trauma (even though it is often overlooked by survivors, and even

therapists unfamiliar with this work).

When we focus on body sensations—both obvious and subtle—we get to see what *immobilized* during the trauma. We see not only how much these still shape our life but also what ~~still~~ remains unprocessed in our ~~traumatized~~ nervous system.

The tricky part about working with body sensations is that they don't usually come with a clear story or explanation. They don't always make sense right away (or ever), so we can't analyze or think through them. That's why many people—including experienced clinicians—often skip working with body sensations. But sensations in the body are wonderful breadcrumbs, offering clues to what needs healing, or ~~is~~ [what is](#) blocking our growth.

What exactly do we mean by sensations? Sensations are the *physical experiences* we feel *inside our body*, whether in everyday moments or during intentional healing work. Sensations can include feeling antsy, blah, blank, blocked, bubbly, buzzy, calm, cluttered, cold, congested, constricted, dead, dull, empty, exhausted, faint, fast, fiery, flat, flowing, fluid, frozen, gooey, gross, heavy, helpless, hot, jittery, loose, meh, nauseous, numb, open, pain, pounding, powerless, radiating, racing, raw, relaxed, searing, shaky, sharp, shivery, slow, soft, sore, spacey, spacious, spinny, still, stiff, stuck, tense, thick, tight, tired, tingly, warm, weary, wobbly.

Identifying sensations gives us a way to explore inner experiences that can be tough to talk about ~~—~~, or have no clear story. In fact, whenever we feel stuck in our healing work, we can always turn to our inner sensations—pleasurable, difficult, or [even](#) benign. Sensations are an excellent jumping-off point, letting healing directions arise organically. Working with sensations is a wonderful reminder that we don't need to understand something to heal it.

### **<bh>Imagery**

*Imagery* can naturally appear in the mind—in everyday life or during trauma work.

Imagery elements can take different forms. They can be clear or hazy, literal or abstract, make sense or be confusing, or brought up consciously or spontaneously. They can show up as mental photographs or visual memories, or short mental movies or visual flashbacks. They might be a symbol or metaphor, a dreamy mental scene, a remembered dream, or even a detailed fantasy. Some images come with sounds or scents while others seem quite simple or isolated.

Imagery offers powerful clues—showing us specific experiences that have been especially impactful (even if we're not sure why). Images are our nervous system's way of talking to us through visual or metaphoric information.

### <bh>Body and Behavior

Our bodies carry many imprints of unhealed trauma—they're a storehouse of experiences from our past. However, instead of slowing down to notice and listen in, we often rush to fix or change so-called problem behaviors. But these behaviors can be important trauma remnants—highlighting attempts to remobilize, cope, or stay safe (Fisher 2017; Levine 2010; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Maté and Maté 2022; van der Kolk 2014). As much as it's tempting to regard them differently, our behaviors are more than actions to be changed.

In SIBAM, the *B* stands for *behaviors*: the overt or very subtle actions we engage in, urges to move our body in certain ways, or the spontaneous positions or postures we make in everyday life or during healing work. Again, these behaviors can feel subtle, random, or ordinary, but during active healing they can be useful ~~for us~~ to follow.

The *B*'s of behavior can include urges to stretch or physically shift; [shake](#); take different body positions; stand up and move in some way; make a defensive posture; become stiff or still, or curl up and fold in. This can also include tiny finger movements; toe tapping; turning or looking in certain directions; or different facial movements or expressions. Additional behaviors

can include bending; being playful; binge eating; biting lips or cheeks; biting nails; bouncing legs; bracing toes; brow furrowing; burping; changing the subject; crossing body parts; crying; eyes hazing; eyes closing; eyes widening; falling asleep; frowning; gagging; holding the breath; jaw clenching; lying down; laughing; leaning to the left or right or back or front; lifting the feet; looking up; losing the voice; mind wandering; picking skin; pulling hair; purging; putting the head down; relaxing; rocking; sitting stock still or stiffening; sitting up; sighing; smiling; [stimming](#); swaying; tightening fists; twirling hair; voice thinning; vomiting; wanting to go silent; wanting to make sound; wanting to stand; wiggling fingers; yawning; and zoning out.

Finally, the *B* in SIBAM also stands for the *body*, specifically *where* in the body other SIBAM elements seem to arise. For example, where in or around the body does an emotion, sensation, behavior or even just a felt presence of something activate? We learn to observe these with curiosity and pacing- instead of judgement, analysis, or ~~intention to quickly~~[an impulse to quickly](#) change them.

### <bh>Affect

The *A* of SIBAM stands for *affect*, a fancy term meaning our feelings or emotions. Again, these emotional clues can show [us](#) what still needs healing—~~or; as well as comfortable feeling~~[what states we're we need to learning to grow or feel more comfortable experiencing and live more from](#). Like the other elements of SIBAM, our emotions can show up as strong or subtle, [or](#) clear or confusing. [H](#)However they arrive, it's important to work with them—[with a gentle curiosity to see where they might lead us](#).

There are many emotions that arise in everyday life ~~and~~[as well as](#) during active healing work. These can include anger, boredom, calm, confusion, contentment, compassion, disappointment, disgust, fear, frustration, grief, happiness, hurt, joy, loneliness, nervousness,

pride, rage, sadness, shame, shock, terror, and worry, to name a few.

## <bh>Meaning-Making

*Meaning-making*—that process of making logical sense of something—activates from the top-left and front parts of our brain. ~~These are important because they can —it , which~~ helps us reflect, analyze, understand, and plan. When we engage ~~this in healing work~~ *meaning-making during healing work*, we ~~get to~~ explore *our* stories (or narratives) ~~to tell ourselves (or safe others) what happened~~, shift confusion through *new deeper insights and understandings* ~~insights and understandings~~, ~~while and seeing~~ *develop* a clearer context for the abuse and its impact. Here, we might also connect ~~new to~~ *new ideas* ~~ideas~~, identify patterns, or consider new behaviors, ~~routines, or healing work~~.

Meaning-making is the SIBAM element people tend to be most familiar with. In fact, it's where some traditional therapies ~~largely often~~ start...and *even* stay. But in trauma healing, it's important to reserve meaning-making for afterward—after we've spent time with our sensations, images, behaviors, and emotions for more organic processing. In fact, many trauma experts now agree that for more comprehensive trauma healing, therapy must integrate methods that go beyond working only with narratives, thoughts, beliefs, insights, and conscious planning *or behavior change* (Fisher 2017; Lanius et al. 2015; Levine 2010; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Shapiro 2018; Siegel 2012; Swart 2019; van der Kolk 2014). So, because meaning-making alone cannot heal complex trauma, models like SIBAM become very helpful—*because they let help* us ~~identify and reintegrate~~ *work with all our* unhealed ~~components of trauma~~ *trauma components*, not just one or two.

Formatted: Font: Italic

## <ah>Why SIBAM Helps

In the world of trauma healing, something called the *Adaptive Information Processing* (AIP) model is a helpful guide. Discovered by world-renowned EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) therapy and trauma expert Dr. Francine Shapiro (2018), the AIP model describes how the nervous system naturally processes the different experiences we encounter in life.

When functioning properly, different aspects of the brain and nervous system work together to process, resolve, and integrate life's ~~various~~-many experiences—both positive and difficult (Kandel 2006; Levine 2015; Shapiro-2018; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014). It's why something upsetting that happened on Monday feels better and more resolved by Friday—without a lot of intense intervention. Here, our AIP system has pruned away what we no longer need (the intense stress and upset), while keeping and properly integrating the information we do (our positive experiences or important life lessons). Therefore, our internal AIP is like a psychological immune system—supporting our inner landscape as we encounter life's ups and downs.

But when an experience ~~becomes-is~~ overwhelming to ~~the-a~~ nervous system, especially during the vulnerable period of childhood development, this internal AIP system can malfunction. Here, encoding ~~clear~~ memories and information ~~about the event~~ can glitch, causing trauma elements to split off into fragments—~~different~~ sensations, images, body experiences, and emotions (Levine 2015; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Perry and Szalavitz 2017; Shapiro-2018; Siegel 2020). These trauma fragments ~~now-then~~ hijack the system, coming

Formatted: Font: Italic

back ~~in to us in~~ dis-integrated ~~form bits—and~~ with limited context (Levine 2010; Frewen and Lanius ~~et al.~~ 2015; Goleman ~~1995~~1997; Maté and Maté 2022; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014).

### <begin story><sth>Lynn's Story

Lynn was learning how her trauma-based SIBAM fragments still activated even in simple life moments. For example, whenever Lynn's son would slam their back door, the loud, sudden thud echoed deep in Lynn's chest (sensation). Next, a visual flash of her friend's childhood bedroom and the shadow of someone coming in (image) would arrive. Lynn's heart would race, her breathing would shallow, and a tight and cold prickle would spread over her arms (body). At the same time, Lynn would become frozen and still (behavior), unable to turn toward her son or call out. She'd then feel a mixture of terror and rage (affect) even though she normally felt safe with her son. Finally, Lynn's understanding (meaning-making) seemed without context. She couldn't put together why her son's lumbering ways made her feel like something bad was going to happen. Even as she began to make logical sense of this, it still didn't stop these fragments from ~~reactivating~~continuing to activate.<end story>

In the next two chapters, we'll explore working with your SIBAMs—but for now you're welcome to lean into the following: SIBAM's more (w)holistic approach ~~will~~ ~~will~~ ~~help you do~~ ~~allow for~~ more comprehensive healing work. Not only will you better process old material, but you'll be able to use this to grow other parts of yourself. ~~As well,~~ ~~You~~ ~~you'll~~ ~~might also~~ notice ~~your~~ ~~some new~~ left-brain understandings ~~arriving~~ ~~showing up~~ more organically as you work with your SIBAMs (Levine 2010; Siegel 2020; van der Kolk 2014).

### <begin exercise><exh>Getting Acquainted with SIBAM

Each day for the next seven days, you can plan two ten-minute sessions to begin learning to work with your SIBAMs. This will likely be a new way of working with your nervous system. But as you stay with this process, you'll grow the skill of noticing, and better engaging, each of these different elements inside. As well, because you're probably pretty good at the meaning-making part of SIBAM (i.e., analyzing, focusing on the trauma story, creating theories and explanations, trying to make change, and so on), I'm inviting you to focus primarily on the *S*, *I*, *B*, and *A* components of SIBAM for just now. We can leave the *M*'s for later.

Below are the guidelines for this exercise. There is also a guided audio version available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132> and a downloadable SIBAM sheet to support you throughout this week.

*Your practice:*

**Settle in.** Enter your comfortable, quiet space, and ensure you won't be disturbed. You can add any comforting elements to the space including soothing music, pleasing scents, soft lighting, or objects you find grounding.

**Ground and pace.** Choose two grounding or pacing exercises from chapter 2 to help your nervous system enter today's practice.

**Choose your target.** Choose an issue or starting target that is pleasurable, neutral, or even somewhat difficult (but no more than a 4-out-of-10 distress level for now). This could be a stressful experience from today or this week, an issue your body is currently dealing with, a person or animal that feels pleasing to you, a memory of a place or location that's meaningful, a special object that brings you comfort, a general inner state you're simply noticing right now, or how something in the room (a picture, a form of décor, a song) impacts your nervous system in a positive or difficult way.

**Set your timer for ten minutes and notice.** With eyes open or closed, gently bring your attention to your chosen target and begin to just notice ~~(without judgement, analysis, or trying to make anything happen)~~ one SIBA element that activates from your chosen target (try to do this without judgement, analysis, or trying to make anything happen).

Some questions to guide this can include:

- ~~begin~~ In what part of my body (specific or general) does this SIBA seem to ~~active~~ active just now?
- How much physical space does it seem to take up inside a part of my body just now?
- What is its level of intensity (out of 10)?
- Does it have movement about it or is it stock still (or does it seem to want movement of some kind)?
- What is its speed—fast, a balanced pace, or very slow?
- Does it have a mood or a feel about it?
- Is it generally pleasing or somehow uncomfortable?~~end~~

As best you can, maintain your observing stance for ten to twenty seconds as you work with this element.

**Pendulate.** Now, shift your attention to something different—for example, the feeling of your feet on the floor, the rhythm of your breath, the presence of the support beneath you, a different sound in the room, a little bit of light entering your eyes or eyelids. Allow this for approximately thirty to forty-five seconds. Then, ~~return~~ pendulate back to your starting target and the SIBA element it activates just now. Observe ~~for~~ another ten to twenty seconds.

**Continue tracking what unfolds.** Sometimes more than one SIBA element will show up at the same time (e.g., a sensation of heaviness in your chest while a body part is clenching; a feeling

of sadness in your gut with a sensation of zoning out; a desire to pull in your shoulders while imagining an old friend, and so on). If so, just allow your attention to ~~be with~~ notice one element at a time—whichever you choose, or whichever seems to get ~~more of your attention~~ your attention more.

**Follow your Domino'ing SIBA elements.** You might also notice different SIBA elements activating one after another (e.g., a feeling of lightness in your upper back leads to an image of a sun; a feeling of sadness in your chest leads to an urge to lower your head; the urge to lower your head leads to a sensation of dread, and ~~an~~ then an image of your father, and so on). If so, that's okay and it's often how the process naturally unfolds. But for now, just return to the original SIBA you were tracking and give it ten to twenty seconds of your awareness before pendulating back. As well. ~~(if your nervous system is seems good at activating only difficult SIBA elements, for now just chose targets that activate (even very) more gently-pleasant or benign or benign SIBAs. You can move into more difficult SIBAs a little later).~~

**Meaning-making.** When judging, analyzing, fixing, urgency, or distraction show up (and they will!), simply return to the last SIBA element (from your target) that you were tracking, and continue. You can also choose to notice and sit with a sensation, image, body element, or emotion that seems to activate ~~s~~ with that meaning-making element (e.g., the urge to analyze and fix your feeling of sadness produces an image of your frustrated mother, ~~and-or~~ a sensation of urgency in your chest). Therefore, whatever SIBA elements activate ~~s~~ with the meaning-making that arises, just notice one and be curious and observant with it can be noticed and then tracked using the process. ~~Let it have space too. That's all you need to do.~~

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

**Communicating with your SIBA element.** To help you stay objective and observant with a SIBA element, it can help to say to it, “I see you. There is no judgment here. I’m simply noticing and tracking the aspects of you in this moment. Take your time. There’s space for you here.”

**Optional journaling or drawing.** If it helps, instead of sitting with your SIBA element(s) [mentally](#), you’re welcome to draw or write them out instead. Sometimes, making this process more concrete helps to slow it down, making SIBA-tracking a little easier. To do this, you can draw an outline of your *body* and mark where and when you feel something inside. You can [also](#) write [down](#) arising *sensations* or *emotions*, or sketch an *image* that activates during a SIBA round.

**Closing your practice.** When the timer sounds or you’re feeling finished for now, gently shift your attention away from your most recent SIBA element, and back to something neutral or pleasing in the here and now. Take your time.

**Tucking-in.** With each SIBA element that arose today, use the tuck-in exercise from chapter 2. You can also do one grounding or pacing activity to end the practice for today.<end exercise>

Understanding the unique language of your traumatized nervous system isn’t about assessing what’s wrong with you. It’s [about](#) learning ~~how to~~ [consciously](#) listen to and be with the different elements and experiences your nervous system has been showing you. You’re making safe and controlled space for these (vital) [inner](#) elements to now be safely seen and heard—and not just ~~quickly~~ analyzed, fought-through, replaced, or even scorned. This is such [an](#) important part of comprehensive healing because it helps your AIP [better](#) integrate ~~that~~ old trauma material (Fisher 2017; Grant 2020; Levine 1997 2010; Parnell 2013; ~~Shapiro 2018~~).

Finally, and very importantly, through this process you’re learning to offer yourself something that was likely missing after the trauma—a gentle and patient *witness* (you) to finally

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

offer your SIBAMs safe presence. You're learning to become that capable adult that you (and your nervous system) needed all those years ago. As world renowned trauma expert Gabor Maté reminds us, children are not just hurt by an event; they are deeply hurt by being left alone with that event (Benazzo and Benazzo 2021).

~~It's~~ [This is](#) why true validation really does change everything.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

### Key Points

- Trauma impacts the nervous system in ways that talk therapies and logic or behavior-based therapies alone [so often](#) can't ~~reach~~.
- SIBAM creates a pathway for deeper and more complex integration, helping trauma fragments be seen and integrated into a fuller story. Slowness, pacing, and gentle and nonjudgemental observation helps process different SIBAM elements.
- Meaning-making can arrive more organically when other [SIBA elements](#) ~~elements of~~ [SIBA](#) are worked with initially.

## <cn>Chapter 9

### <ct>ALLOW <cs>The Practice That Pairs with SIBAM

In chapter 8, we answered the question of why SIBAM ~~helps with~~ ~~is a vital tool for~~ deeper healing. In this chapter, we'll answer another important question: Once ~~the-our~~ SIBAM elements are activated inside, what do we do with them? How do we help them better mobilize, process, and integrate? This is where the ALLOW ~~technique~~ ~~process~~ comes in.

ALLOW is an acronym that stands for *attune, locate, observe, and welcome*, ~~and these~~ ~~-~~ ~~These~~ four steps ~~pair of ALLOW~~ ~~pair~~ beautifully with SIBAM. ~~That's because~~ ~~M-because~~ ALLOW specifically guides ~~you-your~~ ~~to sit with~~ ~~work with the~~ ~~your different~~ SIBAM ~~elements~~ ~~s~~ ~~that~~ ~~-that~~ ~~come up~~ ~~emerge~~ for processing. ~~And a~~ Although I created this particular acronym, it's rooted in well-established mindfulness practices (Kabat-Zinn 2013; Levine and Frederick 1997; Levine 2010; Ogden and Fisher 2015).

When we skillfully pair SIBAM ~~with~~ ~~with the practice of~~ ALLOW, three important aspects of healing can happen: discharging and completing ~~the defensive~~ ~~those protection~~ responses that ~~had to~~ immobilized during ~~the~~ trauma; improv~~ing~~ed AIP ~~functioning~~ to better integrate ~~old~~ fragmented trauma elements; and finally having a patient and curious witness (you) to validate trauma elements that have long been unacknowledged.

#### <ah>The Functions of ALLOW

Let's take a closer look at each element of the ALLOW process.

##### <bh>Attune

When you attune to something, it means that you're turning your attention toward it and staying with it just as it is. You slow down and simply notice it *without* judging, analyzing, or trying to ~~control~~ ~~change~~ or ~~change~~ ~~control~~ it. Instead, you offer your present-moment attention,

letting it show itself to you *as it is*.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Whatever you're attuning to, the key is to do so with patience and curiosity, letting it unfold naturally. It's like saying to an aspect of yourself, "I see you, it's okay, *you can* be here, *please* take your time."

<begin text box>One of the coolest things I've learned in my years as a therapist is the impact of attunement on the *growth of* brain. In fact, many trauma and developmental experts agree that attunement—whether offered by another person or inward toward the self—can help calm the fear and stress centers in the brain while enhancing vital functions of the prefrontal cortex (that mature part of the brain that helps us access our window of tolerance and engager parts!). All of this helps the brain and embodied nervous system *better-slowly* regulate, heal, and *continue to grow-develop* (Siegel 2007, 2020; Schore 2005; van der Kolk 2014). That's how powerful the A of ALOW can be.<end text box>

### <bh>Locate

Locating involves noticing where in (or around) your body you notice a particular aspect of SIBAM. Questions to help with this include: *Where do I specifically (or generally) feel this in my body in this moment? Is it in a particular body part or have more general presence—? Is it more in the top half or bottom half; the left side or the right? Is it completely inside my body, or even a little outside? How much space in (or around) my body does this SIBAM element take up just now?* The beautiful thing about these questions, and their answers, is that they don't have to make logical sense. ~~We simply notice the location~~*All you have to do is simply notice its location—that's all, just where it's active out now.*

## <bh>Observe

Once you've attuned to a SIBAM element, and ~~then~~ located ~~it in its~~ a specific (or general) ~~way~~ body location, ~~you can now~~ it's then time to begin to observe ~~its~~ behavior. Observing can take some practice because we're often trained to quickly figure things ~~out~~, or change them to make new things happen. But, again, true observing is about slowing ~~down~~ your focus and letting a particular SIBAM element be here without agenda.

Questions to help with this observing include: *As I observe this SIBAM element, does it move in any way, or is it stock-still? Does it have a particular feel or ~~a~~ vibe about it, or does it feel more benign? Does it like being noticed or is it more remote and aloof? Do other SIBAM elements seem to activate with it—a sensation, image, emotion, body posture or behavior?*

A useful analogy to help you ~~simply~~ observe your SIBAM elements is to imagine that you are a researcher in a lab. Imagine you're studying (in other words, simply observing) this SIBAM element in its natural habitat. Like a researcher, you wouldn't ~~not~~ bang on the glass. ~~You would~~ not quickly judge or analyze your subject, or even. ~~You wouldn't~~ try to make it behave in some ~~particular~~ way. You would simply slow down and observe it *as it is*. That's what you're doing here.

## <bh>Welcome

Once you've attuned to, located, and begun to observe your SIBAM element, it's now time to welcome it. Welcoming doesn't mean you have to like this element, understand it, or offer it permission to stay this way forever. But, again, *for this moment* in time, you're saying to it (silently or aloud), "You are welcome here right now. I'm just going to be with you as you are in this moment. Take your time. I come in peace." Although pacing is important here,

welcoming can be a powerful part of healing because it teaches you to bring patience, openness, and curiosity to something that has likely been feared, dismissed, or distained since the trauma.

Welcoming (again, with proper pacing) gives your SIBAM element a soft place to land, without urgency, avoidance, ~~or judgment, or~~ scorn. And because healing ~~requires-needs slow~~ space and time, welcoming creates ~~the~~ these conditions ~~for this~~ too.

### <ah>Case Study: Li

Let's look in depth at Li's story to see how SIBAM-ALLOW helps healing.

#### <bh>Li's Background

Li ~~was~~ is the daughter of immigrant parents who themselves endured a life of trauma—terrible childhood poverty, neglect, and horrific cultural conflict. Because their own traumas remained ~~ed~~ ed ~~unhealed~~, it deeply affected their parenting of Li. ~~And a~~ Although they worked hard to give her life staples, emotional warmth, ~~patience, and safety- and understanding were~~ were ~~weren't~~ rarely offered. ~~Li~~ Li learned quickly that her parents were easily overwhelmed—~~so so~~ Li coped by becoming ~~quiet, hyper-independent;~~ and telling herself that her needs shouldn't matter.

When Li was fifteen, she went to a party with a good friend from another school. Initially, Li enjoyed chatting and dancing, but as the night wore on, things ~~began to shifted~~ shifted. Li started ~~feeling-to feel really odd-odd~~ and detached even though she'd had only one beer. While searching for her friend ~~for-to get some~~ support, Li hazily entered a back room in the house. It was there that Li was overpowered by three ~~strange~~ boys, and then held down and raped.

Left alone in the room- ~~after the assault~~ afterward, Li ~~eventually-slowly~~ became more coherent. Still unable to find her friend anywhere, Li left the party alone.

Although she was confused, sore, and humiliated, Li never told anyone ~~what~~

~~happened about the assault~~—not her friend, not her parents, and not even her doctor when Li went for testing ~~afterward~~ afterward. Li told herself to just forget ~~the assault~~ what happened and just focus on the other things in her life—~~so so that's that's exactly~~ what she did.

In her late twenties, Li tried some different therapies hoping to calm persistent anxiety, ~~and panic, and some “really “some pretty~~ dark funks” ~~she would experience. When And, when especially really~~ overwhelmed, Li ~~relied on self-harming to cope~~ used self-harming to cope, or ~~would push herself through .She'd also push herself with~~ intense workouts  ~~routines~~ and ~~rigid eating~~ eating rituals.

Li ~~also carried~~ ~~carried~~ a confusing but ~~deep~~ deeply felt belief that, somehow, she just ~~didn't~~ ~~doesn't~~ ~~didn't~~ belong in the world. And while she ~~knew~~ ~~knows~~ ~~knew it it wasn't~~ logical ~~wasn't~~ ~~isn't~~ ~~logical~~, she often ~~saw~~ ~~sees~~ ~~saw~~ herself as cowardly, weak, very weak and cowardly ~~and~~ chronically undeserving. Li just ~~couldn't~~ ~~can't~~ ~~couldn't~~ shake ~~the~~ ~~the~~ toxic shame that ~~followed~~ ~~followed~~ her ~~everywhere she went~~ ~~goes~~ everywhere she went.:

Li Li ~~began~~ ~~wondered~~ ~~ing~~ if the rape played a some role in ~~all this~~ ~~this~~, but she still wasn't sure because that night felt so fragmented. Moreover, the haziness that accompanied the assault made Li wonder if healing would even be possible for her. Her therapist reassured Li that it was.

### <bh>Li's Therapy

After she developed more solid grounding and pacing skills, and a steadier daily routine, Li was introduced to the SIBAM-ALLOW process. Although she was curious, Li still worried that her fragmented memories would make healing difficult. Li was reassured that vivid and detailed memories *were* 't necessary to proceed with trauma healing. In fact, Li learned that the SIBAM-ALLOW process works beautifully with what experts call implicit (not consciously remembered) memories—~~not consciously remembered memories~~ memories that aren't consciously recalled

Commented [JW12]: AQ: Does changing these verbs to the present straddle the past/present more smoothly?

Formatted: Font: Italic

~~but~~ but instead show up as ~~general~~-impressions, feelings and sensations, and somatic (body-based) experiences—~~general impressions, feelings and sensations, and somatic (body-based) experiences~~. During trauma, even very early trauma, these ~~aspects~~-elements of memory ~~experience~~ still encode ~~in (and affect) in~~ the nervous system (Fisher 2017; ~~Lanius, Vermetten, and Pain 2010~~2011; Levine and Frederick 1997; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Schore 2003, 2009). In fact, these implicit types of memories often show up as SIBAM elements after ~~unprocessed-unhealed~~ trauma (Levine 2010; Fisher 2017; Ogden and Fisher 2015). This is why SIBAM-ALLOW is so important when pursuing deeper trauma healing.

Learning about this became a turning point for Li. She was beginning to understand that her nervous system still remembered—, even if her thinking mind did not. Li felt hopeful knowing she could start ~~this-her trauma~~ work ~~from~~ right where she was.

### <bh>Li's SIBAM-ALLOW Session

Let's visit Li's first SIBAM-ALLOW session, as Li's therapist starts with a check in. ~~Before starting her SIBAM-ALLOW session, Li's therapist pauses to check in.~~

Li reports feeling a sense of nervousness moving through her body, and a slight trembling in her fingers. Li also notices a “funny pressure” behind her eyes, and a mild urge to “get up and leave the office.” Although this is normalized and Li wants to ~~proceed~~continue, this becomes the material that opens the session.

**Interval 1:** Before moving into deeper trauma work, Li is asked to choose a grounding exercise to start. Because of the hyper-arousal Li already feels in her body, she chooses to do some fire breathing—, targeting the sensation of nervousness in her chest and stomach. Together, Li and her therapist do five rounds of breath, then pause. Li is asked to notice if any pleasing SIBA

Formatted: Not Highlight

Commented [JW13]: AQ: This date doesn't match what's in the reference list, and this website says that the Cambridge University Press edition was 2011. Please reconcile and change in all relevant areas. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/impact-of-early-life-trauma-on-health-and-disease/1B24B2C4CD8A239D9BCA659DBA38E3A7>

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

(saving the *M* for later) elements have arisen from the fire breathing. Li reports, “I feel a kind of buzz in my chest...but underneath it, something is slowing down. My lower belly feels warmer and heavier now. It’s kind of nice.”

**Interval 2:** To anchor in this feeling, Li is asked which of these SIBAs she particularly likes just now. Li states she likes “that slow warmth” sensation in her belly and is curious about strengthening it. Therefore, Li applies the ALOW process to this sensation for a twenty-second interval. During this, the therapist sees Li’s shoulders slightly dropping and a very gentle smile beginning on her face.

**Interval 3:** Li reports these pleasant sensations in her belly continue. Her therapist asks if an image might also accompany these. Li is quiet for a moment, and then says, “I see an image of a bright yellow sun; it has the same slow and warm sensation as my belly. I’m also noticing that warmth now moving up into my chest a bit.” Li uses ALOW with these new SIBA elements, allowing her nervous system to further strengthen and enjoy this anchoring experience.

From this more regulated place, Li now feels ready to start ~~some-exploring some~~ trauma processing. Li is reminded that the SIBAM-ALOW process is meant to go slow, ~~just noticing~~ and making space for ~~what the SIBAM elements that~~ shows up. Overwhelming Li’s nervous system with ~~speed~~ or ~~lots of different many elements-SIBAMs~~ at once, is ~~not the goal~~ never a goal in this work.

Li is also reminded that pendulating will be an important part of this process. Therefore, the therapist will coach Li to pendulate back to her anchor if material begins to feel too intense or too fast—or if she needs a break. Pendulating will also help Li’s nervous system practice re-regulating, instead of becoming stuck in only states of distress once they activate (Dana 2018; Levine 2010; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006).

**Interval 4:** To ensure proper pacing, the therapist reminds Li to start with *one small component* of the rape trauma that has a maximum distress level of 6 out of 10. Li is also reminded not to start with the worst or most intense part of the trauma, and that this may not be necessary (or [even](#) advisable) to ~~process-the~~[heal](#) trauma.

Li is quiet for a moment and then states, “I don’t know why, but three starting targets are coming [to mind](#): when the roofie kicks in and I start to feel disconnected, the initial shock of being grabbed by those men [in that room](#), and feeling ~~so~~[really](#) alone without my friend [there](#) afterward.” With support and pacing considerations, Li decides to start [the work](#) with this last target memory.

**Interval 5:** To activate this target, Li’s therapist asks what SIBA element (again, Li is good at rationalizing, so they agree to save *M*’s for later) becomes most noticeable as Li remembers being ~~so~~[really](#) alone afterward. Li presses her hand to her sternum and says, “There’s a heavy, sinking sensation right here. It’s like a knot...not painful, but dense and empty at the same time. It actually looks like a dark, bottomless hole.” Of all these different SIBA elements, the sensation of emptiness paired with the image of the hole are most noticeable to Li just now—even though she’s not sure why. Li begins to ALLOW these paired SIBA elements just as they are.

**Interval 6:** After twenty seconds, the therapist checks in. “What are you noticing? What SIBA elements seem to be getting your attention just now?” Li replies, “I see a light coming up through that dark hole, but it’s not comforting like the light from my sun anchor. This light feels almost imposing or angry.” Li reports this as a 6-out-of-10 intensity and feels able to tolerate this. Li ALLOWS this image and the feeling of its angry and imposing energy for the next twenty-second interval.

**Interval 7:** Li begins to stiffen. “That light is the one that I stared up at while those guys were on top of me. I remember it kept buzzing and flickering.” Li’s therapist asks if other SIBA elements arise with this as well. Li reports that, along with the image of the light, her body is now stiff and still, with a sensation of panic taking over in her chest.

The therapist suggests pendulating back to Li’s anchor. She wants Li’s nervous system to reconnect to something tolerable and soothing. Although wanting to push through, Li agrees and takes a drink of her water. With support, Li reconnects with her warm sun and the pleasant SIBAs it offers her. Once this is active in Li’s [nervous](#) system, she ALOWs it for three twenty-second rounds.

**Interval 8:** As Li’s body gently softens, her therapist once again checks in. Li reports that she feels a 4-out-of-10 warmth in her chest; the image of her sun feels present and comforting. Li ALOWs this for another twenty seconds.

**Interval 9:** As they now re-enter the trauma work, Li remains curious about the buzzing, flickering light. As they return to this image and continue to ALOW, the fingers on Li’s right hand begin to twitch. Li’s therapist asks if Li notices this. Although she hadn’t, Li is now curious. She decides to orient to this particular body movement, and ALOW it for twenty seconds.

**Interval 10:** Li reports a “weird sense” that her right arm “wants to move up and down.” Li’s therapist coaches her to do this slowly and purposely without analyzing it. She reminds Li to stay curious and observant. The next ALOW interval begins.

**Interval 11:** Li’s right arm and fingers become still. She reports that both arms are suddenly “super heavy and tired.” ~~Subtly and slowly,~~ Li [very subtly](#) slumps back in her seat, [and now](#) appears [ing](#) to zone out. The therapist asks Li to become curious about that. Li attunes to the

heaviness in her arms and the “zoning out” sensation in her head behind her eyes. She ALOWs this for twenty seconds.

**Interval 12:** At the next check-in, Li states, “My arms feel really weighed down, like I couldn’t move them [even](#) if I wanted to. My body sort of feels this way too. I feel like I’m too heavy to move or even say words. I feel really lethargic, and I’m really zoning out.” Li and her therapist recognize this as a shutdown response and suspect it’s coming up for processing. Because Li’s self-observation ability is still online, and she also feels able to tolerate this, Li applies a twenty-second ALOW to these two sensations.

**Interval 13:** Before her therapist can check in, Li states, “This actually feels like shame, like a gross, thick fog crawling over me.” Li is asked [about](#) its location in her body in this moment. “My neck and face...like I just want to hide. I feel exposed. I see this thick, gooey cloud all around my head.”

Because a number of SIBA elements are activating, Li is coached to mentally step back. ~~and~~ [She’s invited to](#) slowly notice which [SIBA element](#) most gets her attention [just now](#). Li states, “I don’t know why, but it’s that feeling and image of shame near the front of my head.” Li feels able to be with [these elements](#) ~~is~~ and ~~is invited to~~ ALOW ~~this~~[them](#) just as ~~it~~ [they are](#) ~~is~~. Within a few seconds, Li quietly whispers, “I see you. I know you are shame. I’m going to observe you from here. Take your time.”

**Interval 14:** Li opens her eyes and looks at her therapist. “It’s gone...like, poof. I don’t feel anything now. Everything feels blank.” Because Li may be dissociating or needing a break, she is offered some water and is asked to pendulate back to her anchor. As she reconnects with her sun and its pleasant SIBAs, Li spontaneously shares, “Sometimes when I’m either overwhelmed or numb, I’ll stand in warrior pose. I like the feel of that pose; it’s my favorite part of yoga

class.”

Li agrees to stand up and gently move into this pose to [simply](#) notice what happens. As she does, she observes a bit of “nice” energy “coming up through my middle body.” Li’s therapist then asks if her warrior pose could be paired with Li’s anchoring sun—, seeing what SIBAs might activate then. As she experiments with this, Li notices, “My body likes this. I see my sun cocooning me while I’m standing in warrior. I feel a bit ~~more steady~~ [steadier](#) and a little more powerful.” Li ALOWs these three SIBAs for a twenty-second interval. “My head is starting to feel lighter and clearer, especially behind my eyes.”

**Interval 15:** As Li enjoys this, she also notices a faint agitation, and her right-hand fingers begin to gently fidget. As she attunes to this shift, Li says “I’m not sure why, but my right hand wants to move; it wants to flick or push.”

Li is coached to follow this urge and to do so in that very slow and mindful way. As Li continues to repeat this movement, she suddenly states, “It’s like I’m trying to push someone away or off of me.” Li continues, “This is so weird. How is this happening? Is this my nervous system wanting to fight back?”

Although [her wanting answers to these](#) questions make sense, they agree to save meaning-making for later in the session. Li slowly continues with the pushing movements, offering it ALOW as she does. The therapist reminds Li that her body may want to feel some of the movement it couldn’t that terrifying and incapacitating night. She also reminds Li that her sun can ~~also~~ be here to support Li through this ~~to~~ [moment](#). With this, Li’s eyes moisten as she continues.

**Interval 16:** Li’s hands drop and she looks perplexed. “I feel a bit lighter but I’m actually starting to get pissed off. Who the fuck does that to someone?! Like, who?! It’s completely

psychotic! Ugh, but...I don't know what to do with this."

Because her submit protector has been so dutiful throughout her life, Li is not used to mobilizing her rage. And the therapist doesn't want this new feeling to overwhelm Li's nervous system by coming out all at once. As they slowly and gently experiment with different options, Li likes the idea of vocal toning this ~~arising~~ anger. "I feel like I have words but I don't know what they are or how to let them out. ~~I feel like I can~~ So, I'm going to let them be just sounds."

Li and her therapist try different tones and volumes that "feel right" for her anger just in this moment. Some sounds feel good when they're low and growly, then others feel right when they become higher-pitched and abrupt. After seven rounds of toning, Li reports feeling better and more present. She sits again, takes some breaths, and drinks some [more](#) water.

**Interval 17:** After a period of rest, they attune back to Li's body. After a moment, Li says, "Something's coming to me about my dad. I just see an image of him...sitting in his chair that next morning. He's not looking at me or talking to me...even though I must look upset." After another pause, the *M* of SIBAM activates for Li as she has an insight about her father. "He's always so shut down. He's constantly disconnected. He's gone through a lot in his life." Li's therapist validates this insight: "Right. It was never about you personally. Your dad is so traumatized, he can't really engage...ever. That's about his trauma, not about you." Li slowly nods. Here, her therapist asks ~~her~~ Li what SIBAs activate with this insight.

**Interval 18:** After a moment, Li says, "I'm not sure why, but a memory's coming. I'm in first-person perspective, and I'm five years old. I'm watching my parents fight in our kitchen." Li begins motioning to the left side of her body, pointing to her father as if he were there in the office. Li is [now](#) having a body memory, feeling her own positioning when this event originally happened. Then Li states, "His face is really angry, and he keeps pushing into my mom. I want to

run, but I'm worried—I'm scared he's gonna really hurt my mom. I can't move! Now, he's hovering over her, still pushing into her and making weird grunting sounds." Li's body begins to stiffen and brace, and her breathing stops. She looks to the therapist with wide eyes.

A new memory channel has [begun to opened](#)—[one](#) separate from the rape—, and many of its ~~components~~ [SIBA elements](#) are flooding Li. Here, they pause, and the therapist reminds Li, "You're here in my office and you live in your adult body now." She invites Li to attune to this truth and the SIBAs it might activate. Li is able to feel some grounding and looks around the room to remind her nervous system she's no longer in her childhood kitchen. She slowly and purposefully ALOWs the bit of grounding this brings. Li wants to connect with her anchor as a part of this too.

**Interval 19:** To help Li mobilize some aspects of her family trauma, the therapist directs Li to her father in the office. The therapist asks, "Can you still sense him there, where you pointed a moment ago?" As Li nods, the therapist says, "Attune inside to see if your nervous system wants him here, or somewhere else." Li takes a moment and then states that she wants her father out of the building—she doesn't want him in her therapy space today. The therapist asks how they might do this. Li first wants to wrap him in a body cocoon. She then feels an urge to make swatting motions with her right hand—as if pushing her father toward the office window. She ALOWs ten slow and purposeful motions of this, then pauses and takes a deep breath. Li states, "Okay, he's outside now. That actually feels better." Li is then coached to ALOW the SIBAs of this better feeling [that](#) she [now](#) realizes is relief.

**Interval 20:** Because Li reports now feeling "about 70 percent" in her window of tolerance state, and the [therapy](#) hour is almost complete, the therapist suggests two grounding exercises of Li's choice. ~~They then~~ [Then they](#) offer the tucking -in exercise for the more intense SIBAs that

arose during the session [today](#). [This](#) includes [ing](#) Li's wounded child part (from the kitchen), and [her](#) protector parts (fight, freeze-shutdown) that activated earlier. Li feels exhausted, but grounded and present, at a 7 out of 10.

**Interval 21:** Li and her therapist spend a few moments debriefing and making meaning of their first SIBAM-ALLOW session. Li states, "That was crazy. I thought I'd have to go straight into the worst part of the rape to heal it. But starting with just one sensation from just one part of the memory...it's crazy where that led. I didn't even have to think about it. That stuff just came—stuff I'd even forgotten." Li also stated, "I can't believe that brought up that memory about my parents. I never really think about their fights, but there it was today. Maybe I need to process some of that stuff too. That blows me away."

Li's therapist agrees about the power of this process. "When we apply the language of SIBAM-ALLOW, it gives us natural breadcrumbs to follow." Li agrees it's more organic than some other therapies she's used, and marvels at how the process brings up what needs to mobilize. Li concludes, "It seems easier than trying to figure it out logically—I'm exhausted, but I do feel like something's shifted. I'm not sure what, or where it will go...but I do feel better. I'm still a bit hesitant, but [now](#) I'm [also](#) curious."

Li is reminded to use her grounding and coping when needed, and books her next appointment [for the following week](#).

### <ah>Your SIBAM-ALLOW Process

After reading Li's story, you might want to experiment with [the SIBAM-ALLOW process](#) yourself. As you do, there are a few important reminders. Before you start, ensure that your grounding and pacing skills are in place, and that your daily life routine is fairly steady. You'll

also want to ensure you have a good anchor for pendulating during each session, and that your ALLOWing intervals are short (approximately twenty to thirty seconds) for regular self-check-ins.

Pacing is vital here—it's important to choose [starting trauma](#)-targets that are not too intense, too distressing, or have a lot of complicating factors to them. In fact, for a while, you might use SIBAM-ALLOW solely to strengthen more pleasant material. Remember, working with comfort is also part of healing because it helps to grow your window of tolerance (Dana 2018; Fisher 2017; Levine 2010; Siegel 2007). This helps you connect with your adult and core selves—important allies throughout your healing work.

Finally, if you're using this process on your own, and your distress activates above a 6 out of 10, please set this aside, and reach out to a trauma-informed therapist with this kind of training to support you. I also recommend professional guidance if you experience a lot of dissociation, if you've been diagnosed with a personality disorder, or if the material you're working with feels stuck or not properly processing. Not everything can or should be done independently, especially more complex [childhood](#) trauma. You are in charge of your pacing here—staying mindful of your wellbeing must always come first.

If all [the](#) above aspects are [well](#) in place, you can begin by experimenting with the following SIBAM-ALLOW steps:

*Your SIBAM-ALLOW practice:*

**Gather your resources.** There are some important worksheets to guide your SIBAM-ALLOW process. These are important to support your pacing and correct practice. These include: the target selection sheet, the SIBAM list, and the ALLOW process sheet. All are available at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>. Printing these out and using them each time is strongly advised.

**Prepare your space.** Enter your safe and quiet space with any comfort elements you might like. Ensure that you won't be disturbed and that your timer is set for twenty to thirty minutes.

**Ground and pace.** Take your time to complete two grounding or pacing exercises of your choice. Ensure you feel regulated to at least a 7 out of 10 before starting.

**Anchoring.** Notice one or two calm or pleasing SIBAs that activated from your grounding or pacing. You can also choose an anchor from your life that regulates you (thinking of a cherished pet, a safe person who supports you, a calming place that is real or imagined, a pleasing picture or item in your space today, and so on). Use SIBAM-ALLOW to anchor this in, not rushing but taking the time that you need. This will help you with pendulation when you need it during today's practice. Like grounding and pacing, the strength of your anchor should feel at least 7 out of 10.

**Choose a starting issue or target.** Your starting issue should not be an overwhelming trauma, one you've only recently experienced or uncovered, or one that is currently active in your life. Your target selection sheet can guide you here and should be used with each SIBAM-ALLOW practice.

**Choose your components.** Once you've selected your target issue, you can now choose *one* [specific component-component](#) of that issue to start from. Your target selection sheet will also guide you with this.

**Notice your SIBAM element(s).** Once you've chosen one component of your target issue, notice one to two SIBA elements (save the *M* for later) that now activate. Your target selection sheet will guide you with this.

**Begin to ALLOW your starting SIBA element(s).** With your eyes open or closed, apply the ALLOW process to one activated SIBA element. Do this for approximately twenty seconds using your ALLOW sheet as a guide if you need.

**Self-check-ins for tracking.** After each twenty-second SIBAM-ALLOW interval, gently pause and do a self-check-in. Ask yourself, *What SIBAs am I noticing from this last interval?* You can notice these mentally—or you can write them in your journal or on your SIBAM-ALLOW tracking sheet (download at <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>). Notice *only one or two* SIBA elements. Then offer these no more than thirty seconds of ALLOWing (this prevents other material from coming in and flooding you). One or two elements per interval is the goal.

**Continue.** Repeat the last two steps ~~as long as if~~ processing continues, ~~and if it also and remains~~ feels tolerable ~~to you.~~ Remember to go slow. Give these elements time, space, and patience.

**Pendulate.** Return to your chosen anchor and its specific SIBAs for pacing, re-grounding, and rest when needed. Don't just push through. Ensure you take pendulation intervals—both for you and your nervous system. Remember, ~~this also pendulation also is teaches training~~ your nervous system ~~to to move in and out of distressing material.~~ move in and out of material without getting stuck.

**Engage ALLOWing your parts.** If any self-parts (protector, child, or engager) activate during an interval, you can connect with them in one of two ways: ask it to gently step aside for now, or invite it to be present so you can notice *its* SIBAs. For example, if a protector part tries to distract, freeze, or analyze, you can say, “I see you, I know you’re just trying to help me. I’m okay. Please step aside and watch from the sidelines for now.” If a child part activates with sadness or fear, you can notice these SIBAs gently ALLOW them. If an engager part activates, notice its SIBAs for connection, or invite it to stay and support you through the practice.

Formatted: Font: Italic

**Work with old defensive impulses.** If an urge to mobilize defensive action arises (e.g., through pushing, punching, blocking, turning, curling in, making sounds, speaking words, moving feet, making a running motion, bouncing, fidgeting, hollering, and so on), you can explore these *one at a time*,—and in a very *slowed-down* (or *slow-motion*) way. ~~Do-~~*You can do* this through repeated *micro-movements* until the mobilized action feels completed (or better) for now.

Enacting (*i.e.*, remobilizing) unfinished self-protection reactions, both *slowly* and *repeatedly*, lets your nervous system *better* register *them, to*,—~~process, and then~~ *and* integrate them more thoroughly *now*,—~~while also not overwhelming your nervous system and without overwhelming your nervous system~~ (Levine and Frederick 1997; Levine 2010; Payne, Levine, and Crane-Godreau 2015). Once complete, return to your anchor and offer it ALLOW for some rest and *re-grounding*. You can then return to your trauma processing, or simply work with more comforting SIBAs.

**Close your practice.** When your timer sounds, or when you feel ready, return again to your anchor using SIBAM-ALLOW. Next, tuck in the SIBAs that activated today, including *all the* self-parts that made an appearance—you can ask engager parts to stay with you if you like. Choose one or two grounding or pacing exercises to *then* close ~~for~~ *your practice for* today.

**Meaning-making.** At the end of the session or within a few hours, you can engage in some meaning-making about today's practice. You can journal, using any of ~~these~~ *the following* prompts to guide you: *What shifted as today's session went on? What surprised ~~me~~-you most today? Which child part(s) showed up and when? Which protector part(s) showed up and when? What remobilizing seemed to activate in ~~my~~-your body? How did any gentle mobilizing actions feel? Were there moments when ~~I~~-you felt blocked or stuck? What happened when ~~I~~-you ALLOWed these particular SIBAs? ~~Was-I~~ *Were you* able to connect with one of ~~my~~-your engager part(s)?*

Formatted: Font: Italic

*How did this feel? What was it like to pendulate between tougher material and ~~my~~-your anchor?*

*Where did ~~I~~-you end off today? Where might this lead for a next session? What insights or questions are you am-I left with just now?*

**Aftercare.** Doing SIBAM-ALLOW with a component of trauma can be tiring—~~both~~ emotionally, ~~and~~ physically, and cognitively. You and your nervous system are doing a lot even if it may not seem like it. Therefore, offer yourself something really nice today: a short walk in a nice space, a favorite drink, a yoga class, a massage or body treatment, a favorite show, good music, special time for a hobby, a yummy treat, a visit with a good and safe friend, time with a cherished animal, or something silly and fun. You can even dedicate this self-care to the child you once were, and the parts of your nervous system that have helped you to cope. Never forget to take care of yourself, and all of the different parts of you.

### **<ah>Applying SIBAM-ALLOW for Healing and Growth**

We've explored SIBAM-ALLOW for processing trauma, but you can use this process for other goals too: an engager part you want to strengthen; a good memory or experience you want to enhance; an element of a relationship ~~aspect~~ you're struggling with; a feeling of connection you want to enhance (e.g., with a person, animal, or spiritual being); an element of aspect of yourself or a behavior ~~yourself~~ that confuses you; an aspect of yourself you feel good about; a protector part you want to better understand; a child part you want to better explore; a body part or pain you routinely struggle with; a speed in your nervous system you want to strengthen or calm. There are so many ways to use SIBAM-ALLOW. This process is here for you.

### **<ah>Key Points**

- ~~<begin bulleted list>~~The ALLOW process fosters curiosity, self-trust, and connection with different aspects of SIBAM, making healing feel more organic and possible.

- ALLOW pairs beautifully with the SIBAM model to strengthen different resources, and process trauma elements. The SIBAM-ALLOW process can reengage adaptive information processing ([AIP](#)), while building stronger connection with developing parts of self.
- Pendulating between trauma elements and a comforting anchor grows flexibility between states of upset and regulation.
- ~~Mindfully~~ [Slowly and mindfully](#) repeating protective impulses (like pushing, kicking, blocking, running motions, and so on) can help them remobilize and finally complete—in a safe, well-paced, and [safely](#) controlled way.<end bulleted list>

## <cn>Chapter 10

### <ct>Putting It All Together

Here we are. The last chapter. And, whether you've read this book cover to cover, in doable bits and pieces, or have rereading something a hundred times before it made more sense, that's all okay. Truly. You have done great here!

Finishing a book like this is not like finishing a regular book. It can leave you feeling stirred up, or hopeful, or excited, or tired, or relieved, or even confused. It might also leave you wondering...now what?

### <ah>Reclaiming What Comes Next: The Cycle of Healing

Sometimes, after experimenting with something new, you stand at a crossroads for a bit. One path says, "Put the book away. You've done enough for now. Maybe come back to it later. Or maybe not." The other path says, "Don't walk away from yourself. Not now. Take some time and find your pace. But let this continue to bring you movement. Something real is waiting for you."

It's okay (and really normal) if you feel a pull to both options right now. A part of you might feel ready (or ready enough) to continue on your healing path, while another part might feel wary, and want to drift away. And maybe that old urge to either go hard or shut down is also activating inside.

Because of this, this final chapter will offer you something important—not a rah-rah message to boost you up or convince you of anything—but an invitation to pause and ask yourself, *Where do I really want to go from here, and what pace can I offer myself for just now?*

Healing from CSA is not linear, and it doesn't always have a final destination. Instead, it's a process with different segments and tasks that we enter at different points in time. In other

words, we decide it's time to address something we feel ready (enough) for. We go inside and work with it a little (or a lot). Then, we pause, integrate what we processed, and rest. And soon, we begin the cycle again. This is healing trauma—it's how it works.

You may have even noticed this cycle as you've journeyed through this book. For example, you may have started by practicing foundational skills—grounding and pacing. Then you learned how the nervous system works both during and after trauma. You discovered and began to connect with some of your different parts inside, and you learned the very different language each of these speak. And you did this while experimenting with some new insights and exercises, likely taking needed breaks along the way.

[AH-Now all](#) of this has brought you to this moment. With these skills—this new toolkit—you can customize your healing journey in the way that you want to move forward. Therefore, in this final chapter, let's talk about what comes next for you. Let's bring all of this together and integrate it into a specific healing practice you can create for yourself.

### **<ah>Your Healing Plan**

Trauma healing can make you feel both hopeful and excited, but also hesitant and unsure. This is especially true if you're moving forward only with good intentions, or a more general or abstract healing plan in mind. Here, it will become easy to lose your footing, causing uncertainty, delay, and avoidance to develop. That's why concrete structure, clarity, and predictable pacing are vital—and you'll use these to develop a plan to help you heal.

One way to do this is through a metaphor I call the stone path.

### **<bh>The Stone Path Metaphor**

When doing a piece of healing work, the metaphor of the stone path can be very useful—

because it gives you a template to properly assess and plan different aspects of your healing.

Aspects like:

- Choosing the specific piece of healing work you're ready for
- The micro-tasks needed for this healing component
- The timing and pacing you'll need for each task
- The specific tools and processes required
- Signs that show you're making your desired progress

Think of your healing journey as a long and winding path made up of many round or square stones. This entire path represents your overall healing journey—the big picture of your recovery and your growth throughout life.

As you imagine this path, also notice its different sections or *segments*, each with a its own small *cluster of stones*. You can think of these segments as one chapter of your healing (or a healing sub-goal, if you like). Completing a healing segment will move you forward on your path, while also allowing the next healing segment to appear.

Finally, within each healing segment are *individual path stones*, each representing *one* healing task for that segment—a task that is clear, concrete, and manageable.

This stone path metaphor is so important because it breaks your healing journey into well-paced, doable pieces: individual healing tasks (~~the~~ [each](#) path stones), healing sub-goals (the [segments along](#) ~~the segments~~—or [clusters](#)—of stones on the path), and your overall healing goal (the entire path itself). This will help stay you clear and on track, so the momentum of your work stays both balanced and healthy.

## <ch>Working with Your Stone Path: An Example

Let's say one of your overall healing goals is to respond to life primarily from your developing adult self—with less activation of your fight protector part. Let's say one of your overall healing goals is to calm your fight protector part—so you can respond to much of life now from your developing adult self. Let's also say that you've noticed that your fight part really activates whenever you feel taken advantage of—echoing themes from your CSA.

In your marriage, this theme gets triggered (and then plays out) primarily through an unequal division of labor—household chores. Currently, when this issue comes up, it's your fight protector part that quickly takes over, using yelling, insults, and door-slamming as its tools.

One of your overall healing goals (as represented by your entire stone path) is to now be primarily is your live from your adult self. You want to do this in everyday life, and in challenging moments with others, like your partner.

In working toward this overall goal, you're focusing on one segment (one sub-goal made up of four specific stones) on of this part of your your path:

- Slowing down your triggered hyper-aroused speed
- Feeling a little more empathy and compassion for others
- Staying present to listen to another person's perspective
- Demonstrating this through reflective statements and constructive communication during disagreements

Right now, one healing task (i.e., the one stone of the four) you've chosen to work on involves: slowing down your nervous system's hyper-aroused speed when disagreeing with your partner about household chores. For the next month, when such disagreements arise this one path stone's healing task will include:

- <begin bulleted list> Reminding your partner that you're working on this healing goal
- Holding the symbol representing your adult self while asking yourself, *Which internal speed would the adult part of me feel right now?*
- “Borrowing” that speed, then attuning to its sensation in your body
- Strengthening this adult pace through three rounds of ALLOW
- Taking respectful breaks to use fire breaths (five rounds minimum) if your inner speed moves into the orange or red zone hyper-arousal zones <end bulleted list>

### <ch>Planning Your Path Stones

To help you experiment ~~with~~ [with the stones on your healing path](http://www.newharbinger.com/57132) ~~your healing stone path~~, please visit <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>. Here, you will find Jillian’s story, and how she planned two path stone tasks for an important segment of her healing. You’ll also find the stone path planning sheet that Jillian used, including helpful questions to guide your ~~own~~ planning process. Print out your planning sheet and complete it by hand—do not do it mentally or just on a screen. Even with good intentions, this is a sure-fire way to lose track, become lost, and then feel defeated. Writing out goals, then keeping them visually handy, is a key to accomplishing the healing you need (Clear 2018).

### <bh>The Resting Bench Metaphor

Every stone path must offer rest on the journey. One way to do this is by installing a resting bench. This metaphoric bench will become your cue to ~~rest~~ [take respite](#) and integrate ~~as you~~ [the work walk your](#) ~~from your~~ different healing stones. You can create (mentally or in some visually concrete way) your resting bench with ~~whatever~~ specifications that feel pleasing ~~to you~~—traditional, unique, plain, fancy, off to the side, under a nearby tree, or somewhere in the

distance you can still access. This bench is vital ~~to~~ to your healing ~~journey~~ process—you are welcome to pace here anytime you need.

Visiting your resting bench is not a sign of avoidance. Rather, it offers the timing your nervous system needs. You might sit on your bench for a few minutes during an exercise, or for a day or week as you work one stone's task. You might even rest here for a season between stones or segments of healing ~~that are important to you~~ that you're working through. You, and your adult or core self—and maybe your therapist—will decide when you're ready to return to your path.

It's important to remember that, after coping with trauma, taking rest (that's not about avoidance or shutdown) can feel pretty unfamiliar. You might want to be farther along your stone path, or believe that you can (or should) leap over some stones. Although this makes sense, it just can't be done. Each path stone is important and must be worked ~~through~~ with. You're seeing that life's not *all in* or *all out*, so tools like your resting bench can help with this learning.

### **<ah>Five Experiences on the Healing Path**

As we travel our path and experience some healing, certain experiences tend to arrive. These aren't necessarily signs that something needs retooling. In fact, they're often signs that mobilizing is happening. The problem is, if we don't recognize these experiences, we can misinterpret their meaning and become confused or discouraged. Therefore, identifying these experiences and normalizing their arrival ~~is~~ will be an important part of your healing work.

Let's take a look at each.

### **<bh>Standing on the Bridge**

There's this funny in-between stage of healing when something is shifting but hasn't quite taken root. It's like standing between two locations called *no longer* but *still not yet*. I call

this experience *standing on the bridge*.

Standing on the bridge tends to happen when you've started a new healing task, or you've just completed one. You feel like you're on the cusp of a change, but you're still not sure how it might play out.

Signs that you're on the bridge can include: feeling lighter or less reactive but still not sure who you're becoming; certain people no longer fitting in your life but unsure who might fit better; feeling safer seeking out an intimate relationship but years of not dating make this feel pretty uncertain; feeling ready to leave your toxic job but still unsure what you'd like to do instead.

Although being on the bridge can feel awkward and unclear, it's actually a natural place of pause—It's an important-needed space for integrating, learning, and resting before your-the next steps-steps arrive. It's not you being stuck, resistant, or stagnant—it's more like the period when winter turns to spring. Although the surface may still look bare, beneath, new seedlings are indeed taking root.

It's important-vital to know the difference between standing on the bridge and actually actually-being stuck. When you're on the bridge, you might feel unsure, —but\_ also hints of anticipation and curiosity. When you're stuck, you feel different, —like you're recycling old patterns —or nervous system states that feel frustrated ing and blocked. When on the bridge, you feel somehow lighter and a little expectant. Feeling stuck is much more-heavy-and-slow heavier, sticky, and slowerslow.

If you do find yourself at a place of stuckness, it's important to know that this isn't a failure. In fact, stuckness can mean you're bumping against fear —, because your parts of you

~~learned early that~~ ~~learned early that~~ change can mean trouble. So, here, you acknowledge ~~a~~ a-fear is arising, ~~and-which may-can even even~~ become your next segment of healing.

### <bh>Big Swings

When we're healing and shifting into something new, what I call *big swings* often start to happen. These big swings show up when we're leaving something old, but we end up overshooting in the opposite direction. Here, you and your nervous system are seeking middle ground by first experiencing the other end of ~~the~~ ~~the~~ spectrum.

Although this can feel confusing or even unsettling, during healing these big swings are common and natural (Heller and LaPierre 2012; Levine 2010; Schwartz 2021). Having functioned at one end of the spectrum to cope, you now overcorrect as your search for more balance.

Examples of big swings ~~can-can include~~ ~~show up throughout healing~~: never saying no to now saying it all the time; keeping everything private to oversharing with everyone; being emotionally shut down to now crying at phone commercials; never speaking your mind to joining three political movements.

If you have some big swings, please be patient with yourself. ~~And, if~~ ~~if~~ you're overstepping a lot, you can let others know—while keeping a few apologies handy ~~as-you-work~~ ~~through~~ ~~at~~ this stage.

### <bh>Thinking Along a Continuum

~~One-big~~ ~~A main~~ theme of this book has been about pacing—because healing isn't linear—and there are stages to navigate. There will be times when you feel more solid and ready, while other times you'll need to pull back a little—or a lot. To better assess your needs ~~through~~

~~these stages~~ in these periods, it can help to have something to give you perspective. Therefore, thinking of healing along *a continuum* lets you measure, balance, and choose your momentum.

A continuum is like a long and thorough slide rule; ~~a lengthy~~ scale to move along ~~with lots of different~~ with different options and intensities. As ~~you grow and change~~ you grow, you'll move away from rigid patterns and narrow limits (e.g., all-or-nothing thinking) while experimenting with ~~more~~ greater flexibility and choice. Although some black and white responding might still be in play, you'll also be wondering about different shades of gray.

~~Some~~ Here are some options healing healing continuums ~~you can work with~~ can give you:

- **Pacing.** How fast or slow will I move through a specific healing task (i.e., minutes, hours, days, weeks, or months)?
- **Intensity.** ~~How much of each~~ What intensity of each SIBAM element do I want to experience (e.g., 5 percent, 20 percent, 50 percent), and what tools can ~~help I use to me~~ with this stay in these limits?
- **Duration.** How long will I ALLOW a SIBAM element before pendulating to my anchor ~~or taking a break~~ (e.g., five seconds, ten seconds, ~~twenty seconds, thirty~~ twenty seconds, ~~one minute~~)?
- **Target starting points.** During trauma processing of a specific event, where do I want to start in the memory (e.g., two days before, a few hours before, ~~ten one hour minutes after it after happened, twelve one year hours~~ after)? This continuum is important because processing a trauma doesn't ~~require-need~~ us to start with (or even go to) its worst point (Levin 1997 2010; Fisher 2017; van der Kolk 2014).

- **Distance.** During trauma processing, where do I want my mental perspective to be (e.g., seeing the memory from five feet away, from the ceiling or the sky, from down the street ~~or, from~~ another town, or even from a different planet)?
- **Connection.** What level of ~~closeness or distance~~ [connection](#) do I want with a particular person in my life just now (once per week, once per month, twice a year, preparing for no contact)?
- **Level of change.** How much change am I aiming for during an exercise, healing task, or healing segment (e.g., 5, 10, 30 percent)? What tools are needed to meet this percentage, and what benchmarks will signal that I [have](#) met it<end bulleted list>

At <http://www.newharbinger.com/57132>, you'll find different continuums, as well as guiding questions to assess your different pacing options. You can download copies to ensure [that](#) they're handy as you work through your healing segments and tasks.

### <bh>Reevaluating Your Relationships

Healing can make you more discerning about who you share your time and healing with. As you shift and change, you might find yourself wanting (or needing) to pull back from the people you once turned to. This is common in healing and, although not with everyone, it will likely happen with some in your life.

If you do feel this way, ~~know that you~~ [you](#) don't have to ~~leave end a~~ [relationships suddenly, suddenly or even make plans to](#) go no contact. ~~—~~But it does mean you might be getting better at assessing who can offer safe space, and those who cannot.

A permission that's helpful: You don't owe everyone your [trauma](#) story—because not everyone will [be](#) capable of holding it. And often, this is a reflection of where they're at in life, and not of your ~~healing~~ process or worthiness to change. In fact, this may be [a](#) part of reclaiming

something vital: building reciprocal relationships with ~~people capable to do so~~ [more capable people](#). Although bittersweet, ~~these kinds of~~ [such](#) shifts are quite normal and can ~~actually even~~ foster [you](#) deeper healing goals.

### <bh>Needing a Therapist

Some people make good progress on their own for a time, especially if they have good foundation and support. But for many survivors more complete healing must be done in the presence of a safe and skilled professional.

Many experts agree that the right kind of therapy—that’s varied and highly trauma informed—can be a life-changing healing resource ~~for many~~, especially [for](#) those who’ve had to go it alone (Fisher 2017; Levine 2010; Ogden, Minton, and Pain 2006; Schore 2012; Siegel ~~2010~~ [2020](#); van der Kolk 2014). A good trauma therapist understands the depth of CSA—and not just on the mind but on the (developing) brain and nervous system. They understand the nuances of collaborative repair, and use a combination of mind and nervous system–based therapies (Fisher 2017; Lanius et al. 2015; Levine 2010; van der Kolk 2014).

If the idea of therapy feels overwhelming to you, that might be an important healing segment ~~of~~ [your](#) path (that, ironically, you can do in therapy). Being seen in vulnerability may be ~~very pretty~~ new and scary, but it ~~isn’t~~ [’s not](#) weakness, a burden, or giving up control.

You can research good clinicians, read about their approach, and even have a free consultation to decide. For many, this step is an important game-changer—a fundamental resource on their [healing](#) path.

Finally, it bears repeating: if you’re new to this work, if your nervous system is good at dissociating, if your foundational skills or daily life routines are shaky, or you’ve been diagnosed

**Commented [JW14]:** AQ: The date in the back is 2020. Which is correct? Please reconcile and change all references where appropriate or add to the list if necessary.

with complex trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, a personality disorder, or a serious mental illness, do not do this work alone. Find a qualified therapist to help you.

### <ah>A Final Word About Healing

It's really important for you know that healing is *not* meant to dismiss the past. It doesn't excuse any of what happened, and it doesn't let anyone off the hook. Not at all. But sometimes our trauma can feel like a sacred monument; a marker of truth yet to be properly acknowledged. It can also serve as a familiar touchstone—a predictable hell versus an unknown freedom. And, in a strange way, holding onto trauma can feel safer—staying vigilant might mean we can't be hurt again.

After a relationship with trauma, these worries make sense—and many women have them ~~as they stand at this~~ [as they stand at this](#) crossroads. But these so-called secondary gains come at a huge cost: ~~I~~ ~~Because they~~ [hey](#) keep you suffering. They keep you powerless. And they keep you forever stuck in the past. The life meant for you can't find its real footing. Who you are beyond trauma can't ~~ever feel free~~ [find the daylight](#).

So much of trauma healing is really about permission: ~~;~~ Permission to just consider. Permission to gently imagine. And permission to listen to that deep echo inside—that beneath all the weight and the shit of the past, there is a part inside you that stayed whole and intact. In fact, it's the part ~~of you~~ that brought you [here...](#) to ~~this~~ [holding this](#) book. ~~It's~~ ~~Because it's~~ always ~~rooting~~ ~~hoping for~~ you ~~to~~ [will](#) find your way home.

This is the quiet power of reclaiming what was lost. It's not loud, it's not instant, or even fully understandable. But it is real. And it wants to [make sure that you know: remind you again](#) ~~and again that~~ you were never too damaged. ~~That~~ ~~I~~ it is ~~not~~ [never](#) too late. ~~You~~ [You](#) were not

born to ~~forever~~ carry what someone put upon you.

So please know, you are allowed to outgrow the trauma. Not because it didn't matter, ~~;~~  
~~Not and not~~ because it's time to forget ~~and or~~ move on...~~but~~. ~~But~~ because somewhere inside,  
~~there~~ lives the *you* who was always—and ~~is~~ right to this moment still is—meant to be.

### <ah>Key Points

- <begin bulleted list>The stone path is a metaphor for your overall healing journey ~~in life~~, with ~~specific~~ paced segments of healing ~~work~~, and ~~individual~~ specific path stone goals ~~within these~~. ~~Each path stone will complete a segment of healing, then leading to the next segment when you're ready~~.
- The resting bench is a reminder to pause, restore, and integrate. It is not failure, procrastination, or a sign of being stuck.
- Five common experiences along the healing path include: standing on the bridge, big swings, thinking along continuums, reevaluating relationships, and needing a skilled therapist.
- Healing is not about erasing or excusing the past—it's about reclaiming your ~~inherent worth, your~~ wholeness, and the life you were meant to live. You are not broken, ~~and~~ it's not too late. Reclaiming, ~~and you are not alone~~—reclaiming what was lost means coming home to yourself, ~~—gently, step by step, and with safe and loving support~~.<end bulleted list>

## <cn>Conclusion

You've arrived at the final part of this book—the conclusion. Allow me to say, I'm truly proud of you. You've stayed with something important here. And, not just the new information or exercises ~~throughout~~-in this book. You've also connected with places inside that you may not have visited for a while—or ever. So, here, you've done something really ~~really~~-good for yourself—even if you've experimented with just one or two things. ~~Every small step really does create change.~~ And when you revisit these pages ~~in the future~~ (~~which~~ ~~which~~ I that hope you that ~~will~~will), you'll do it in a way that 's ~~is~~-unique to *that* time ~~and space...~~—and that ~~is~~-will be perfectly okay.

Your commitment to this work also ~~highlights~~-shows something else—~~that~~ ~~that~~ a key fundamental truth is ~~starting to take~~starting to take root ~~inside~~. The truth that no matter what happened to you ~~to you~~, there ~~remains a part of~~ 's a deep part inside you ~~that~~that is *always* intact—~~and~~ ~~It's the part of you that can still show its hope, and consider~~still imagines a life different from your beginnings.

ESe-even if it doesn't feel like it yet, or other parts of you are still tangled and sore, ~~know~~ please know ~~that~~ this core of you remains untouched by trauma... and quietly alive sits inside waiting for you.

How do I know this part of you ~~still~~-exists—this *always* part of you that you were born with inside? I know this ~~through an experience from watching~~ ~~I had watching~~ a new life begin—and the ~~emergence~~-emergence of ~~an~~ an inexplicable love that came with it. Let me explain.

<begin story><sth>**Brady's Story**

A number of years ago, I was invited into a very special moment. My dear friends were having their last baby, and they asked me to be in the delivery room. I don't have ~~any children of my own~~ ~~of my own~~, so I'd never had this experience ~~personally~~. But I was honoured and delighted to be there for my friends—and to witness baby Brady make his entrance into the world!

Having heard many stories of childbirth, I expected the labor to take a while—that we'd have lots of time to visit, be excited, and prepare for the baby ~~to arrive to make his arrival~~. In fact, this ~~had been~~ ~~was~~ the case for my friends' first ~~two two sons~~ ~~boys~~, so we expected ~~the it to be the~~ same with their third.

Were we in for a surprise! Brady left no time for preparatory rest, pain medication, or even small breaks between contractions. ~~From~~ ~~From~~ the first labor pain to Brady's arrival was three hours in total! And he was a big fella—over ten pounds—the biggest of ~~the~~ three brothers (and something Brady takes pride in!). However, because of this, Brady's mom endured horrific pain, while his dad (and ~~his~~ auntie) felt powerless throughout.

~~But~~ ~~But~~ ~~here's the incredible thing~~ ~~then...~~ ~~something amazing happened.~~ ~~As soon as~~ Brady ~~finally~~ ~~entered~~ ~~arrived into~~ the world. ~~And with that,~~ ~~something remarkable happened.~~ ~~All the~~ ~~distress~~ ~~the distress and struggle~~ ~~instantly dissolved~~ ~~instantly dissolved,~~ ~~and,~~ ~~and the~~ ~~the~~ energy in the room became vastly different.

~~Brady's~~ existence ~~had~~ changed everything.

What I was witnessing was more than the relief of birth, ~~and or~~ mother and baby being declared healthy. ~~It~~ ~~This~~ was the arrival of a fierce and ~~absolute~~ ~~absolute~~ love ~~as of~~ two people meeting someone ~~utterly~~ ~~special~~ ~~unique~~—someone inherently ~~whole~~ ~~special~~ and ~~unique~~ ~~whole~~, and already ~~deeply~~ ~~and~~ completely lovable.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

What was so powerful about this moment was that Brady hadn't done anything yet—literally. He hadn't smiled or cooed. He hadn't spoken a word. He hadn't shown some unique ability to earn ~~him~~his worthiness. We knew nothing about Brady, ~~or~~ who ~~he would~~he'd become, or the different life paths he ~~would~~might eventually take. ~~Moreover, And, again,~~ Brady's birth~~helping Brady~~ had been incredibly taxing; his parents had gone through significant stress~~come into the world had been incredibly painful and highly taxing.~~ Yet, ~~in an~~in a heartbeat instant, ~~absolutely~~ none of that mattered. ~~It was all replaced~~There was just ~~by~~pure immense delight—in this one-and-only boy.

In the years since, we've told Brady his birth story—~~and~~as well as his dad's first words to him. As he ~~carefully took Brady from the nurse's~~ gently held Brady ~~arms~~ and gazed ~~down~~ into ~~those~~his soft blue eyes, his dad proudly stated, "We love you, Brady. ~~.~~—You are such a good boy."

I don't think I'll ever forget those words—*you are such a good boy.* Because they really were the truth. ~~And they really were the truth!~~ ~~Brady's~~Brady's dad didn't mean "you're good because you've earned belonging in our family, or somehow proven your deservability, or because ~~we expect~~ you'll never ~~struggle or make mistakes~~struggle or make important mistakes." He said these words because ~~of an of undeniable truth about his brand-new son~~of something undeniable:

*~~You and your life matter just because you are you.~~ You are special and whole because you exist. ~~You and your life matter just because you are you.~~ ~~You are always whole because you exist.~~ ~~Nothing that happens will ever change that.~~ ~~The~~This world is now different because you are here. ~~And nothing that happens will ever change that.~~*

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

In fact, ~~had~~had the nurse taken my friends down to the nursery and said, “Take your pick. They’re all exactly the same—~~e~~e—tiny, bald, and crying.” my friends would ~~have~~have ~~chosen~~chosen Brady without a moment’s hesitation~~hesitation~~. ~~Because they~~Because deep in their bones they know he~~know deep in their bones that Brady isn’t~~is not interchangeable. In the history of the world there has never been another Brady.~~There...~~has never been another person just like him—~~and~~and there never would be again.

And...~~He is one of a kind. And...~~

<begin unnumbered list>They get to love him.

They get to ~~witness~~join his ~~his~~his unique life.

~~They~~They already know~~already know~~ how lucky they are.<end unnumbered list><end

story>

### **All Are Born Special, But Not All Will Know It**

There was another experience after Brady’s birth that showed how this can go awry.

<begin story><sth>Not All Will Know Learn They’re They’re Special

When Brady and his mom were moved to their suite, their roommate was a ~~new~~ mother struggling to connect with her baby. As this newborn lay crying, her mother told visitors not to pick her up ~~or~~euddle her for fear of “spoiling her.” We overheard her father say the pregnancy

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

Formatted: Font: Bold

Formatted: Font: Bold

Formatted: Font: Bold

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

~~was~~ was unplanned, and how exhausted they felt at the thought of another child. Their tone throughout was dismissive and removed.

Although parents will undeniably make (many) mistakes ~~and even miss opportunities to repair some of these~~, emotional neglect is a very different matter. So, as we ~~we heard~~ listened to these struggling parents, our hearts ~~broke~~ began worrying for ~~for their~~ their ~~tiny baby~~ baby. ~~Because even though~~ Because although she was already lovable and whole ~~lovable~~, she might may not ~~not~~ grow up to learn this about herself ~~come to know this about herself growing up~~. And And ~~not~~ not because she had (-or would develop) some game-changing flaw, but because this truth might be withheld from her ~~w~~. ~~But because~~ If her parents can't see their inherently good girl—they'll struggle to reflect this so she can see it too. ~~her parents couldn't see their~~ inherently good girl—or reflect this so she'll she'd see it too.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

And should trauma also also be in this child's little girl's future, her parents might fail to attune to her then. They might neglect to tell show her that no matter what ~~happens~~, she will always matter be lovable—she will always will ~~be~~ always be whole enough. That under her layers of pain and self-protection there is still that part of her that is whole and intact. This will be the truth about this little girl ~~little girl~~, but she won't learn to feel this it... and that will change everything. <end story>

This story is important because it's also your story too—because you. ~~You~~ were also born inherently good. ~~This enduring~~ This core part of you is is built into your being. I—it is is not created created, but ~~but~~ shown to you. However, if this wasn't mirrored (enough) to you enough growing up , or after you experienced trauma from abuse—then—just like those kittens blind to

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

horizontal lines, you won't ~~feel this truth~~ learn to see it, and that will impact so much. ~~And that counts for a lot!~~

That's why true healing isn't ~~just only~~ about insights, or developing skills, or processing trauma. It ~~is's~~ also about reclaiming —who you *still* are inside, despite what you went through or never received. ~~This And this part of you offers a life beyond is far more than survival-based living survival, because this~~—it's the ~~deep~~ part of you ~~also that~~ knows your true path.

~~As As~~ you ~~continue continue your to do your healing work~~ healing, you'll ~~notice feel~~ glimmers of this ~~whole part of you~~—through small moments of ~~gentle self~~ compassion, ~~balanced a growing patience with a difficult emotion, presence or even a flicker of joy, and joy that touches you. When And when~~ you do, ~~pause and notice~~, let yourself just be with this...

~~. This is you beyond the trauma. This is You remembering. This is You beyond trauma.~~

Of course, there ~~will will~~ ~~also~~ be days when you forget—or when the weight of the child and her protectors are near. So, on ~~such these~~ days, ~~please~~ let these words find you, and let this book offer a soft light to guide you.

And when you, again, feel ~~that a flicker glimmer~~ inside, ~~allow yourself to softly whisper to her: let yourself pause... and then quietly whisper:~~

<begin unnumbered list>*I see you there.*

*I am'm learning to come home to you to you.*

*I am finally reclaiming the always part of me.*<end unnumbered list>

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

### <cn>References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. 1979. "Infant–Mother Attachment." *American Psychologist* 34 (10): 932–7.
- Anderson, F. G. 2021. *Transcending Trauma: Healing Complex PTSD with Internal Family Systems*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Anderson, F. G., M. Sweezy, and R. C. Schwartz. 2017. *Internal Family Systems Skills Training Manual: Trauma-Informed Treatment for Anxiety, Depression, PTSD & Substance Abuse*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media.
- Arain, M., M. Haque, L. Johal, P. Mathur, W. Nel, A. Rais, R. Sandhu, and S. Sharma. 2013. "Maturation of the Adolescent Brain." *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 9: 449–61. <https://doi.org/10.2147/NDT.S39776>.
- Benazzo, Maurizio, and Zaya Benazzo. 2021. *The Wisdom of Trauma*. Documentary film. Science and Nonduality (SAND).
- Bennett, Natalie, and William O'Donohue. 2014. "The Construct of Grooming in Child Sexual Abuse: Conceptual and Measurement Issues." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 23 (8): 957–976. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2014.960632>.
- Blakemore, C., and G. F. Cooper. 1970. "Development of the Brain Depends on the Visual Environment." *Nature* 228 (5270): 477–78. <https://doi.org/10.1038/228477a0>.
- Blakemore, S.-J. 2018. *Inventing Ourselves: The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Bowlby, J. 1988. *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bradshaw, J. 1988. *Healing the Shame That Binds You*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.
- Bradshaw, J. 1990. *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child*. New York: Bantam.
- Briere, J. N., and D. M. Elliott. 1994. "Immediate and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse." *The Future of Children* 4 (2): 54–69.
- Briere, J. N., and D. M. Elliott. 2003. "Prevalence and Psychological Sequelae of Self-Reported Childhood Physical and Sexual Abuse in a General Population Sample of Men and Women." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 27 (10): 1205–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2003.09.008>.

- Briere, J. N., and C. Scott. 2019. *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Brown, R. P., and P. L. Gerbarg. 2012. *The Healing Power of the Breath: Simple Techniques to Reduce Stress and Anxiety, Enhance Concentration, and Balance Your Emotions*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Brulé, D. 2017. *Just Breathe: Mastering Breathwork for Success in Life, Love, Business, and Beyond*. New York: Atria/Enliven Books.
- Carnes, P. J. 2005. *The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free of Exploitive Relationships*. 2nd ed. Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- Chopra, D. 2004. *The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire: Harnessing the Infinite Power of Coincidence*. Nevada City, CA: Harmony Books.
- Clear, J. 2018. *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*. New York: Avery.
- Courtois, C. A. 2010. *Healing the Incest Wound: Adult Survivors in Therapy*. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Craven, S., S. Brown, and E. Gilchrist. 2006. "Sexual Grooming of Children: Review of Literature and Theoretical Considerations." *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 12 (3): 287–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600601069414>.
- Dana, D. 2018. *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Divine, M. 2015. *Unbeatable Mind: Forge Resiliency and Mental Toughness to Succeed at an Elite Level*. 3rd ed. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Doidge, N. 2015. *The Brain's Way of Healing: Remarkable Discoveries and Recoveries from the Frontiers of Neuroplasticity*. New York: Viking Books.
- Elliott, I. A., A. R. Beech, and D. Grubin. 2010. "The Psychological Profiles of Internet Sex Offenders: A Self-Report Study." *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 16 (2): 149–67.
- Engel, B. 2006. *Healing Your Emotional Self*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Engel, B. 2015. *It Wasn't Your Fault: Freeing Yourself from the Shame of Childhood Abuse with the Power of Self-Compassion*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Finkelhor, D. 1984. *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research*. New York: Free Press.
- Finkelhor, D. 2008. *Childhood Victimization: Violence, Crime, and Abuse in the Lives of*

*Young People*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Fisher, J. 2009. "Psychoeducational Flip Chart: Understanding and Healing from Trauma," self-published psychoeducational tool.

Fisher, J. 2013. *The Living Legacy of Trauma Flip Chart: A Psychoeducational In-Session Tool for Clients and Therapists*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing and Media.

Fisher, J. 2017. *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors: Overcoming Internal Self-Alienation*. New York: Routledge.

Fisher, J. 2021. *Transforming the Living Legacy of Trauma: A Workbook for Survivors and Therapists*. New York: Routledge.

Fosha, D. 2003. "Dyadic Regulation and Experiential Work with Emotion and Relatedness in Trauma and Disordered Attachment." In *Healing Trauma: Attachment, Mind, Body, and Brain*, edited by Marion F. Solomon and Daniel J. Siegel, 221–81. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Frankl, V. E. 2006. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Frewen, P. A., and R. A. Lanius. 2015. *Healing the Traumatized Self: Consciousness, Neuroscience, Treatment*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Freyd, J. J. 1996. *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Freyd, J. J. 1999. "Blind to Betrayal: New Perspectives on Memory for Trauma." *The Harvard Mental Health Letter* 15 (12): 4–6.

Friedrich, W. N. 2007. *Children with Sexual Behavior Problems: Family-Based, Attachment-Focused Therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Giedd, J. N. 2004. "Structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Adolescent Brain." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1021 (1): 77–85. <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1308.009>.

Giedd, J. N. 2014. "Adolescent Brain Maturation." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 54 (2, Suppl.): S1–S2.

Gil, E., and T. C. Johnson. 1993. *Sexualized Children: Assessment and Treatment of Sexualized Children and Children Who Molest*. Rockville, MD: Launch Press.

Gilbert, P. 2010. *Compassion Focused Therapy: Distinctive Features*. London: Routledge.

Goleman, D. 1997. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. 10th

anniversary ed. New York: Bantam Books.

Grant, M. 2020. *Change Your Brain, Change Your Pain: Based on EMDR and the Latest Neuroscience*. 2nd ed. Sydney: Mark Grant Publishing.

Hanson, R. 2013. *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*. New York: Harmony.

Heller, L., and A. LaPierre. 2012. *Healing Developmental Trauma: How Early Trauma Affects Self-Regulation, Self-Image, and the Capacity for Relationship*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Herman, J. L. 1992. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books.

Herman, J. L. 2006. "Sexual Violence and the Mind-Body Connection." In *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books.

Herman, J. L. 1998. "Recovery from Psychological Trauma." *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 52 (S5): S145–S150. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1819.1998.0520s5S145.x>.

Jensen, F. E., and A. Ellis Nutt. 2016. *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*. New York: Harper.

Kandel, E. R. *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006

Kabat-Zinn, J. 2013. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Revised ed. New York: Bantam Books.

[Kernberg, Otto F. 1975. \*Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism\*. New York: Jason Aronson.](#)

Kellogg, N. D. 2009. "Clinical Report—The Evaluation of Sexual Behaviors in Children." *Pediatrics* 124 (3): 992–8.

Kellogg, N. D. 2010. "Sexual Behaviors in Children: Evaluation and Management." *American Family Physician* 82 (10): 1233–8.

Lalich, J., and M. L. Tobias. 1994. *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Other Abusive Relationships*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House.

Lanius, R. A., E. Vermetten, and C. Pain, eds. 2012. *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lanius, R. A., U. F. Lanius, P. Frewen, and F. Corrigan, eds. 2015. *Neurobiology and Treatment of Traumatic Dissociation: Toward an Embodied Self*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Lanius, U. F., S. L. Paulsen, and F. M. Corrigan, eds. 2014. *Neurobiology and Treatment of Traumatic Dissociation: Towards an Embodied Self*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Lénárd, Z., P. Studinger, B. Mersich, L. Kocsis, and M. Kollai. 2004. "Maturation of Cardiovagagal Autonomic Function from Childhood to Young Adult Age." *Circulation* 110 (16): 2307–2312. <https://doi.org/10.1161/01.CIR.0000145157.07881.A3>.

Levine, P. A. 2010. *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Levine, P. A. 2015. *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Levine, P. A., and A. Frederick. 1997. *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

[Mahler, Margaret S., Fred Pine, and Anni Bergman. 1975. \*The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation\*. New York: Basic Books.](#)

Maté, G. 2003. *When the Body Says No: Exploring the Stress–Disease Connection*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.

Maté, G. 2008. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.

Maté, G., and D. Maté. 2022. *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture*. New York: Avery.

Neufeld, G. n.d. "Attachment-Based Developmental Approach." Lecture, Neufeld Institute. [Accessed 2017.](#)

Neufeld, G., and G. Maté. 2004. *Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.

Noblitt, J. R., and P. Noblitt, P. 2014. *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Narratives, Evidence, and Healing Approaches*. 3rd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Ogden, P., and J. Fisher. 2015. *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy: Interventions for Trauma and Attachment*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Commented [JW15]: AQ: Do you have a link for this lecture?

- Ogden, P., K. Minton, and C. Pain. 2006. *Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Parnell, L. 2013. *Attachment-Focused EMDR: Healing Relational Trauma*. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Payne, B. R., P. A. Levine, and M. A. Crane-Godreau. 2015. "Somatic Experiencing: Using Interoception and Proprioception as Core Elements of Trauma Therapy." *Frontiers in Psychology* 6: 93. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00093>.
- Perry, B. D., and M. Szalavitz. 2017. *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook*. 3rd ed. New York: Basic Books.
- Porges, S. W. 2011. *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, Self-Regulation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Porges, S. W. 2017. *The Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Porges, S. W., and D. Dana, eds. 2018. *Clinical Applications of the Polyvagal Theory: The Emergence of Polyvagal-Informed Therapies*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Rothschild, B. 2000. *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Salter, M. 2012. "The Role of Ritual in the Organised Abuse of Children." *Child Abuse Review* 21 (6): 440–451. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2215>.
- Salzberg, S. 2020. *Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves and the World*. New York: Flatiron Books.
- Schmidt, S. J. 2009. *The Developmental Needs Meeting Strategy: An Ego State Therapy for Healing Adult Attachment Wounds and Traumatically Stored Memories*. Houston, TX: DNMS Institute.
- Schore, A. N. 1994. *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Schore, A. N. 1996. "The Experience-Dependent Maturation of a Regulatory System in the Orbitofrontal Cortex and the Origin of Developmental Psychopathology." *Development and Psychopathology* 8 (1): 59–87. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579400006970>.
- Schore, A. N. 2001. "Effects of a Secure Attachment Relationship on Right Brain Development, Affect Regulation, and Infant Mental Health." *Infant Mental Health Journal* 22 (1–2): 7–66.

- Schore, A. N. 2002. "Dysregulation of the Right Brain: A Fundamental Mechanism of Traumatic Attachment and the Psychopathogenesis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 36 (1): 9–30. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2002.00996.x>.
- Schore, A. N. 2003. *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Schore, A. N. 2005. "Attachment, Affect Regulation, and the Developing Right Brain: Linking Developmental Neuroscience to Pediatrics." *Pediatrics in Review* 26 (6): 204–17.
- Schore, A. N. 2012. *The Science of the Art of Psychotherapy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Schwarz, L., F. Corrigan, A. M. Hull, and R. Raju. 2017. *The Comprehensive Resource Model: Effective Therapeutic Techniques for the Healing of Complex Trauma*. London: Routledge.
- Schwartz, R. C. 1995. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Schwartz, R. C. 2021. *No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Schwartz, R. C., and M. Sweezy. 2019. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.
- Scott, S. 2001. *The Politics and Experience of Ritual Abuse: Beyond Disbelief*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Shapiro, F. 2018. *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy: Basic Principles, Protocols, and Procedures*. 3rd ed. New York: Guilford Press.
- Siegel, D. J. 2007. *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Siegel, D. J. 2015. *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin.
- Siegel, D. J. 2020. *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. 3rd ed. New York: Guilford Press.
- Siegel, D. J., and T. P. Bryson. 2011. *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York: Random House.
- Steele, A. 2020. *Imaginal Nurturing Resources for Healing Attachment Trauma*. Revised ed. Vancouver, BC: Self-published.

- Steele, A. 2020. *Developing a Secure Self: An Attachment-Based Approach to Adult Psychotherapy*. Vancouver, BC: Catapult Press.
- Steele, K., O. van der Hart, and E. R. S. Nijenhuis. 2009. "The Theory of Trauma-Related Structural Dissociation of the Personality." In *Dissociation and the Dissociative Disorders: DSM-V and Beyond*, edited by Paul F. Dell and John A. O'Neil, 239–58. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Swart, T. 2019. *The Source: The Secrets of the Universe, the Science of the Brain*. New York: HarperOne.
- Teicher, M. H., and J. A. Samson. 2016. "Annual Research Review: Enduring Neurobiological Effects of Childhood Abuse and Neglect." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 57 (3): 241–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12507>.
- Van der Hart, O., E. R. S. Nijenhuis, and K. Steele. 2006. *The Haunted Self: Structural Dissociation and the Treatment of Chronic Traumatization*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Van der Kolk, B. A. 2014. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Viking.
- Whitfield, C. L. 1987. *Healing the Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.
- Watkins, J. G., and H. H. Watkins. 1997. *Ego States: Theory and Therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Winnicott, D. W. 1965. *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London: Hogarth Press.

Commented [JW16]: AQ: My search is showing that this was self-published. Please reconcile.

Commented [JW17R16]: <https://books.google.com/books?id=Z25A0xKRQsC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>. Do you have a different copy?