

BREAKUP BOOTCAMP

The Science of Rewiring Your Heart



Amy Chan

I have changed the names and identifying characteristics of some individuals discussed in this book, including all Renew participants, to protect their privacy. Some of the individuals I discuss are composites of multiple Renew participants.

While I have thoroughly researched the information contained in this book, the material in this book is for general educational purposes only and should not be considered a substitute for medical treatment, psychotherapy, or advice from a mental health professional. If you are experiencing depression, abuse, addiction, or any other severe emotional illness, please seek professional help immediately.

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FIRST EDITION

Designed by Michelle Crowe

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-0-06-291474-3

20 21 22 23 24 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

EXERCISE: Identify Your Emotional Reaction Go-To

The moment you feel an uncomfortable emotion—whether that be sadness, anger, longing, and so on—what do you do? How do you react to the urge? Do you self-medicate by reaching for alcohol, drugs, food, or validation from others? Do you suppress your feelings and distract yourself with work? Or perhaps you inflate the emotion with catastrophic thinking, exaggerating the negatives and minimizing the positives? List how you might currently avoid/distract yourself from feeling and processing your emotions:

EXERCISE 1: What's Your Version of the Story?

When we vilify someone, we automatically assume the role of the victim. That does not help you heal or move forward. Throughout this book, we are going to actively reframe your story. To start, grab your journal and a pen. In ten points, write your story about what happened between you and your ex. You can start anywhere you'd like, just keep it to ten points. You get to cheat on this one—you can make each point as long as you'd like. Elaborate as if you were telling the story to a friend. We will be using this ten-point story for the next exercise.

Caught in a Thinking Trap?

Your brain can be one tricky son of a bitch. After all, it was designed over two hundred thousand years ago. It was designed to make you survive the harsh conditions of the environment, and the hunter-gatherers who were the most sensitive to any risks or cues of danger had the best chance of survival. Also, social exclusion from the tribe was a matter of life or death. Even though today we don't face the same threats, our brains have yet to adapt. Our brains are still survival machines, have an innate negativity bias, and are extremely sensitive to social rejection. The reason you can get into rumination spirals of negative thinking isn't because you're crazy; it's because your brain is doing its job—trying to keep you safe.

But the same MO also can keep us in negative thinking traps! Behavioral scientist and positive change strategist Dr. Naomi Arbit explains:

“Neuroscientists have pinpointed an area of the left cerebral hemisphere, often referred to as ‘the interpreter.’ This part of our brain is constantly weaving narratives in order to try and help us maintain our sense of self, our personal narrative. This interpreter filters in-

coming information and experiences and puts its own spin on it. But the narratives fabricated by this part of the brain do not necessarily correspond with the truth. This is worsened by our tendency to believe these narratives and accept them as fact.”

Our brain weaves its own narratives and that can cause us to create cognitive distortions. Also referred to as thinking traps, these are irrational ways of thinking that reinforce negative thinking, often perpetuating psychological states like depression and anxiety.¹³

EXERCISE 2: Separate Fact from Fiction

Review your ten-point story and separate fact from fiction. Start by identifying and circling any of the common thinking traps. Notice if there are any thinking traps you are more prone to. Once you’ve done this, write your story again, but this time use only five points and stick to the facts.

- **Filtering:** Focusing on only the negative, filtering out any positives. Also referred to as negativity bias (e.g., *The whole relationship was a lie*).
- **Catastrophizing:** Thinking in extremes and imagining the worst-case scenario (e.g., *I’ll be alone forever*).
- **Overestimating:** Exaggerating and amplifying the chance that something bad will happen (e.g., *If I run into him I’ll have a mental breakdown*).
- **Fortune-Telling:** Predicting the future as if it’s 100 percent factual (e.g., *I’ll never find love at this age*).
- **Overgeneralizing:** Making sweeping conclusions and broad assumptions based on one or a few experiences (e.g., *I was cheated*

on, so all men are liars).¹⁴

- **Mind Reading:** Misconstruing facts and data and assuming that you know what others are thinking or feeling (e.g., *He looked at me and then said something to his friend with a chuckle, he must be making fun of me*).
- **Should Statements:** Imposing expectations on yourself or others of how things should be, which is often rooted in criticism, judgment, and arbitrary rule-making (e.g., *I should have been married by this age, I'm so stupid for wasting my best years on that guy*).¹⁵
- **Blaming:** Refusing to take accountability for emotions, thoughts, and actions (e.g., *It's his fault I'm so broken*).
- **Personalizing:** Making situations about you even when there's no evidence or logical reason to do so (e.g., *I must be unworthy of love because he ghosted me*).
- **Change Fallacy:** Expecting people to change in order for you to feel a certain way. Often rooted in a belief that others are responsible for your happiness (e.g., *If he put a ring on my finger, then I'd be happy and feel safe*).
- **All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Perceiving situations or people in black and white, often using words such as “always,” “never,” “everybody,” and “nobody” (e.g., *Men never want to commit to me. This always happens to me*).

Once you've finished your five points, notice if the updated story feels a little less emotionally charged. Does it seem more neutral, lighter? We will be referring back to this updated story in the last chapter.

Seeing Red

To help Renew participants work through anger from an energetic approach, naturopathic doctor and holistic coach Erica Matluck leads one of the first physical sessions on the first day of bootcamp. She explains how anger is rooted in the solar plexus chakra, which correlates anatomically with the abdomen. Chakras are energy centers that, when blocked, can trigger physical, emotional, and mental imbalances. Instead of letting the energy of anger build up and result in a volcanic explosion, she teaches the women to use a combination of intention and imagination to defuse it. Here's how.

EXERCISE 1: Transmute Your Anger

- Stand up tall with your feet firmly on the ground, shoulder-width apart. Close your eyes.
- Assign your anger the color red.
- Bring your attention to your solar plexus (the area around your belly button).
- Visualize the red color in this area and really feel it. Pay attention to the sensations. Notice the temperature and how the sensations move with your breath.
- Next, identify a word that is needed to heal the anger (“forgiveness,” “acceptance,” “compassion,” etc.) and assign that word a color (blue works well for most people).
- Imagine that color pouring into your body through your abdomen and let it flood your entire body and the area around your body.

Watch it change the color of your anger and flush it out completely until you are bathed in the second color.

- Take a few deep breaths here and repeat the exercise three times.

Plank a Pose!

In the second exercise, Dr. Matluck emphasizes the importance of moving the energy of the emotion through the body. Energy is meant to flow, and when it doesn't, it can cause dysfunction in the body.

She suggests that there is a strong relationship between healing anger and confronting limiting beliefs: "Fire is the element associated with this chakra, and by creating heat in the body while confronting limitations set by the mind, we can use the energy of fire to transform anger that is stored in the body."

To demonstrate this, she leads the women through an exercise where they set a timer and do a plank pose for as long as they believe they can. When they can no longer hold it, they look at the timer to note where their perceived limit is. Next, the women are advised to add thirty seconds to their previous time and repeat the plank pose. You can hear grunts in the room as they reluctantly try again.

"Watch the urge to give up and allow the heat you're creating melt your anger away," Dr. Matluck encourages as she walks among the women, burning sage as a way to cleanse the space.

As she notices some women struggling to hold their plank position, she advises them to bring their focus back to the breath, breathing slowly and deeply, and to continue pushing past their limit. When the entire room is done with the second plank, almost every single woman was able to hold her plank longer than her first time—a small but meaningful feat in pushing past a perceived limit.

EXERCISE 2: Ready to Plank?

- Create a plank position with your body. You have the option of supporting your upper body with your hands or your forearms.
- Set a timer and do the pose for as long as you can.
- When you're done with your first plank, note the amount of time you were able to hold your position—this is what you believe your limit is.
- Rest for a few minutes.
- Set your timer, adding thirty seconds to your previous time, and repeat the pose. Don't forget to breathe deeply.
- Imagine your anger melting away. If it helps, use the visualization from the first exercise, imagining your anger in a red color and it melting or fading away.
- Try to keep going, even after the time is up!

EXERCISE 3: Ready, Set, Write!

The last exercise is to reflect through journaling. By writing about how we feel and where we feel it, we start to make sense of what is happening. This is a great time to try “flow state” writing. Set a timer for fifteen minutes and make sure you turn off your phone or other distractions so that you are uninterrupted. Put an inspiring song on repeat to help you reach a state of flow. At Renew, we play Cello Suite no. 1 in G Major, by Johann Sebastian Bach, for this writing exercise. Give yourself a writing prompt and go! Here are some examples:

- What are my deepest areas of grief and frustration?

- What is my body trying to tell me?
- What can I learn?

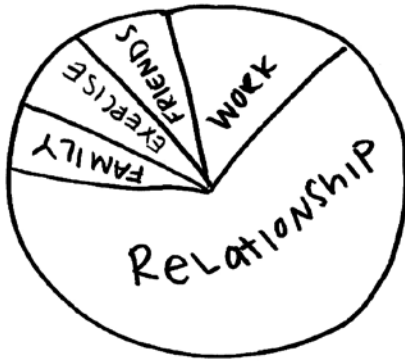
Try not to filter or judge your thoughts; just keep the pen going. By doing a flow state exercise like this, parts of your subconscious start to come out—it's like emptying what's been stored and stuck in the mind. The act of writing is therapeutic in itself and can decrease physiological reactivity.

EXERCISE: 4-7-8 Breathing Technique

The 4-7-8 breathing sequence is based on an ancient yoga technique and was developed by Dr. Andrew Weil. It will help calm down stress and anxiety immediately.²³

1. Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth (right behind your front teeth).
2. Breathe in through your nose for a count of four seconds.
3. Hold your breath for seven seconds.
4. Release your breath through your mouth with a whooshing sound for a count of eight seconds.
5. Without a break, repeat the entire technique four times in a row, then resume normal breathing and activity.

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is effective, because when you are feeling anxiety, your breathing tends to become very shallow and you don't get all the oxygen you need. This technique helps you increase oxygen intake, allows the oxygen to energize your cells, and expels carbon dioxide from your lungs.



Before



Now!

Cindy's pie before and after. On the left is how she used to spend her time and energy. The right is the new pie—how she's going to fill up her new blocks of time with new focuses, from self-care to meeting new people to taking a trip to Costa Rica she's been dreaming about for ages.

EXERCISE: Balance Your Pie

- Using the example on the previous page, draw two circles to represent your “pie”—your pie when you were in a relationship and your ideal balanced pie moving forward.
- Make a plan to fill up the pieces of the pie that were once consumed by “Relationship” with enriching activities that nourish you—self-care, volunteering, traveling, taking up a new hobby, or whatever else creates joy and empowerment in your life.
- Create an action item for yourself to proactively build on a specific piece of the pie. Does one piece of the pie go toward exercise? Book an additional fitness class. If it’s community you crave, volunteer with a charity or nonprofit to help others in need. Also, reach out to two friends you haven’t invested much time with lately and ask them out for lunch. Create tangible action steps that will help you fill up your newfound freedom and appreciate the independence in a positive light. How will you use your time, energy, and attention?
- This pie exercise is also something to refer back to when you start dating again. To prevent yourself from gradually devoting more and more of your pie to your relationship at the expense of the other things that light you up, you can use the pie to remind yourself to create discipline around how you exert your time and energy. Balance is key!

EXERCISE: Create a Morning Ritual

Each morning, set aside time for yourself so that you can get grounded and start your day feeling inspired. Ideally, you would have an hour for this, but if you can only afford fifteen to thirty minutes, that's a good start. Begin your morning ritual before you look at your phone and allow the outside world to start dictating your mood. You're the boss here—set the tone of the day the way you want: calm, positive, and inspired.

PART 1

Meditate. If you need some assistance to start meditating, try an app like Insight Timer, Headspace, Mindful, or Calm.

PART 2

In your journal, write down one intention/goal for the day. When you write, use phrases such as “I can” and “I will” instead of “I should.”

PART 3

Choose one of the following mood-enhancing exercises that you will complete during the day. If you wish, you can choose to complete more than one.

- Remind yourself to pause and notice your surroundings today. Look for three things that are beautiful. Write them down in your journal.
- Get your heart rate pumping by exercising for a minimum of thirty minutes.
- Write a letter or email of gratitude to someone you love (not your ex!) and tell them how much they mean to you.

- Do something to pamper yourself—take a long bath, buy yourself flowers, have a manicure.
- Do something that gets you in touch with your body—yoga, tantra, dance! If you can't make it to a class, play your favorite upbeat song and dance by yourself at home for five minutes.
- Spend thirty minutes with a friend. It's best to do an activity together while talking, and make it a rule to not talk about the breakup.
- Play with a dog. A study conducted by the University of Missouri showed that non-pet owners who played with a dog for just a few minutes a day had increased levels of the brain chemicals serotonin and oxytocin—both mood elevators.³⁴
- Get a massage. Massage also boosts serotonin levels and reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol.
- Force yourself to smile. Laughter helps stimulate production of the feel-good hormone serotonin. Watch a funny movie or your favorite stand-up routine on YouTube.
- Help a stranger. Be kind for no reason. Volunteer. Studies show that people who were assigned to do one random act of kindness a week for multiple weeks showed a sustained increase in happiness levels.³⁵ Research also shows that volunteering has a significant impact on mental health.³⁶ It helps shift the focus from yourself to others and helps break the cycle of negative thinking.
- Learn something new. Whether you pick up a language, an instrument, or a hobby, learning a new skill physically changes the brain. The brain builds new neural connections and strengthens the synapses in the cerebral cortex.³⁷ This can help

improve working memory and verbal intelligence and increase levels of self-satisfaction and happiness.³⁸

EXERCISE: Start a Daily Gratitude Practice

When you're in the throes of pain after a breakup, it can feel impossible to find positivity or gratitude. But here's the secret about gratitude: it's a state that is cultivated, not something you simply have when things are going well.

Incorporate a gratitude practice in either your morning ritual or your evening ritual. Write down three things you're grateful for today and why. Close your eyes to visualize what you've written down and feel thankful for them. Relive the moment. Put yourself back in a particular situation and smile the way you did at the time, recount what you saw, smelled, tasted, and felt that made you happy and grateful. You can re-create the feel-good chemicals by associating yourself into the memory, allowing yourself to re-experience the warm feelings of the moment.

BONUS POINTS: *Find an accountability buddy—a friend or family member—and send a screenshot of your entry every day for thirty days. Have your buddy do the same.*

EXERCISE: Attachment Quiz

By understanding the different attachment styles, you can identify the triggers that cause you (or future partners) to feel suffocated by intimacy or deprived of it. Take this quick quiz to determine which attachment style best describes you.

Instructions:

1. Using a scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), rate each statement from each category below based on how you identify with it.
2. For each statement, assign points based on the value of your score. For example, assign 4 points to a statement that you rated as a 4.
3. When you have completed each category, total the scores from each statement to find your category score.

CATEGORY I

1. I'm afraid I will be abandoned or rejected.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

2. I am usually yearning for more connection from my partner.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

3. I start to panic when I do not hear from my partner.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

4. I tend to disclose too much information too soon when I first start dating someone.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

5. I count the hours that it takes for the person I like to text/call me.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

6. When the person I like doesn't reply to me quickly enough, I want to punish him.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

7. I'm constantly thinking about a romantic partner, pining over him, fantasizing about him, or obsessing over him.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

8. I tend to act clingy or needy with my romantic partner.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

9. I tend to base my self-worth and identity on my partner's validation of me.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

10. I get completely devastated after a breakup, even if the relationship was short.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

Category I points: _____

CATEGORY II

1. I'm afraid that too much intimacy will take away my freedom and independence.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

2. I feel easily smothered by romantic partners.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

3. I have a hard time being in touch with/talking about my feelings.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

4. I have a hard time being vulnerable and opening up to others.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

5. Having to depend on others makes me feel uncomfortable.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

6. If a partner tries to push for commitment, I feel pressure and want to withdraw.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

7. I tend to focus on the imperfections of a new partner within the first few months of dating and usually end it.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

8. I tend to feel suffocated in relationships.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

9. I tend to chase people with an impossible future.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

10. I need a lot of alone time and time away from my partner.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

Category II points: _____

CATEGORY III

1. I'm comfortable with emotional intimacy.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

2. I feel comfortable giving and receiving love.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

3. I trust that I can count on others and others can count on me.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

4. When a conflict with my partner arises, I communicate and work through the problem.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

5. I feel comfortable expressing my needs.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

6. I feel comfortable communicating my boundaries.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

7. I respect my partner's privacy and boundaries.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

8. I tend to trust my partner and my partner's feelings for me.

STRONGLY DISAGREE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 STRONGLY AGREE

9. I'm comfortable with commitment.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

10. When I'm upset, I am able to self-soothe and get myself back to equilibrium relatively easily.

STRONGLY DISAGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STRONGLY AGREE

Category III points: _____

Total Points

Category I: _____ Category II: _____ Category III: _____

If you scored highest in Category I, your attachment type is *anxious*.

If you scored highest in Category II, your attachment type is *avoidant*.

If you scored highest in Category III, your attachment type is *secure*.

EXERCISE: Replace Your Reactions

By first recognizing the patterns of your reactions, you can then identify alternative ways of responding and practice honoring your boundaries and the boundaries of others without hurting the connection.

In the first column of the worksheet on page 88, write down what triggers you. If you identify as anxious, you may find most of your triggers result in protest behavior; if you identify as avoidant, you may find most of your triggers cause you to create distance. You may veer more secure and find yourself having triggers in both categories.

Once you've identified your key triggers, in the second column write down how you have typically reacted in the past. Next, in the third column, brainstorm a healthier response. The objective is to create a strategy for replacing your old reaction with a healthier response while you're in a nonactivated state (that is, not upset or emotionally charged) and to have a plan of action the next time your nervous system is sending you panic signals.

If you are in a relationship or starting to date someone, you can use the last section to identify the triggers of your partner and how you have reacted in the past. Now that you understand the different attachment styles, use compassion in coming up with a healthier way to respond to and support your partner.

Example: Anxious

Trigger: The person I'm dating takes hours to reply to my text.

Past Reaction: I keep texting and texting, which makes me more angry and desperate.

Healthy Response: I won't jump to conclusions when I don't hear back and will use self-soothing exercises to manage the feelings of

anxiety. Instead of texting multiple times to get validation, I will journal or call a friend and commit to not sending another message until I've calmed down.

Example: Avoidant

Trigger: When the person I'm dating keeps wanting to hang out and I need time for myself.

Past Reaction: I get overwhelmed and don't return any calls or texts, or I see the person out of guilt and end up feeling resentful.

Healthy Response: Communicate clearly that I need some time for myself, that my taking time for myself doesn't mean I feel differently, and that once I've had some space I'll reach out to find a time that works for the both of us.

Example: Supporting your partner when he is triggered

Partner's Trigger: He feels suffocated and resentful when he doesn't have enough free time.

Your Past Reaction: I would make assumptions that when he wanted space this meant he was losing interest. I would get upset and guilt him into spending time with me.

Healthy Response: Now that I understand that time apart is healthy and not a threat to the relationship, I can welcome his need for space without guilt and ensure each week I have designated days where I too am seeing friends and doing activities that light me up.

ANXIOUS

Trigger	Past Reaction	Healthy Response

AVOIDANT

Trigger	Past Reaction	Healthy Response

YOUR PARTNER

Trigger	Past Reaction	Healthy Response

EXERCISE: Who's in Your Village?

Conduct an inventory of the five adult people you spend the most time with. This can include your friends and family, but may also include people you might not necessarily feel close to but spend a lot of time with, such as work colleagues, roommates, and neighbors. The objective is to assess who is in your village and if those are high-safety or low-safety relationships.

For each person, answer the statements below regarding how you generally feel around him or her on a scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always). Don't think too hard and go with your gut.

STATEMENT	#1 (NAME)	#2 (NAME)	#3 (NAME)	#4 (NAME)	#5 (NAME)
<i>I feel safe and secure when I'm around this person.</i>					
<i>After I leave an interaction with this person, I feel positive energy.</i>					
<i>I trust this person.</i>					
<i>I feel respected by this person.</i>					
<i>I know I can count on this person.</i>					
<i>I feel supported in this relationship.</i>					
<i>I feel a sense of connection and belonging when I'm around this person.</i>					
<i>I feel that I can share my feelings with this person without being judged or criticized.</i>					
<i>I feel there is an equal exchange of give and take in this relationship.</i>					
<i>This person respects my boundaries.</i>					
TRUST SCORE:					

SCORING

The chart gives you an idea of the relationships that are shaping your brain and central nervous system.²³

Low-Safety Relationship (0–35)

These may be abusive or high-conflict relationships. If you're surrounded by people who score low on trust, you likely find yourself feeling on edge, anxious, or depleted from your relationships. There may be an uneven power dynamic, where you feel subordinate or disrespected. Because you're not getting healthy dopamine from your closest relationships, you may have a tendency to seek a dopamine fix from other sources—for example, indulging in food, alcohol, shopping, or other addictive vices. If the majority of your relationships are low safety, it will be difficult for you to feel relaxed and calm because your sympathetic nervous system is on constant high alert. It's in your best interest to try to decrease the amount of time you spend with these people. If a relationship is physically or emotionally abusive, it's of the utmost priority to get out of the relationship, which may mean you seek professional help to support you.

Medium-Safety Relationship (35–65)

If most of the people you spend time with are in this category, you may find yourself feeling apathetic about your relationships. Relationships may not feel rewarding or stimulating. You may want to try to grow the relationship by changing the current dynamic, setting limits, and/or communicating what you need in order for the relationship to be a positive value exchange.

High-Safety Relationship (65–100)

If most of your relationships are in the high-safety category, that's great news! This means your life is filled with relationships that fos-

ter growth. Since you're spending a significant portion of time with these people, not only are you getting a healthy dose of dopamine, but you're also feeling connected, trusting, and safe.

Exercise: Create Your Ladder

Examine the list on the next two pages and circle any of the beliefs that apply to you. Feel free to add beliefs that aren't on the list in the blank spaces.

Me

I'm worthless.

I'll always be alone.

It's my fault.

I'm not pretty enough/good
enough/skinny enough.

I should have known. I should have
done something sooner.

If only I were X, it would have
worked out.

No one will ever love me.

I have to find someone to be
happy.

I should be over it by now.

I shouldn't be so upset.

I can't live without my ex.

I can't handle this.

I'll never meet anyone else.

I can't be alone.

I can't ever trust anyone else.

I'm unlovable.

I'm not enough.

I'm too much.

I will be abandoned.

I will be rejected.

I have no time.

I am not safe.

Others/The World

I can't rely on anyone.

People always let you down.

Dating is impossible in X place/at
X age/in my circumstances.

All the good men are taken.

He will take away my freedom.

I can't trust men.

I'm never a priority to others.

Love is painful.

The Future

I'll never find anyone.

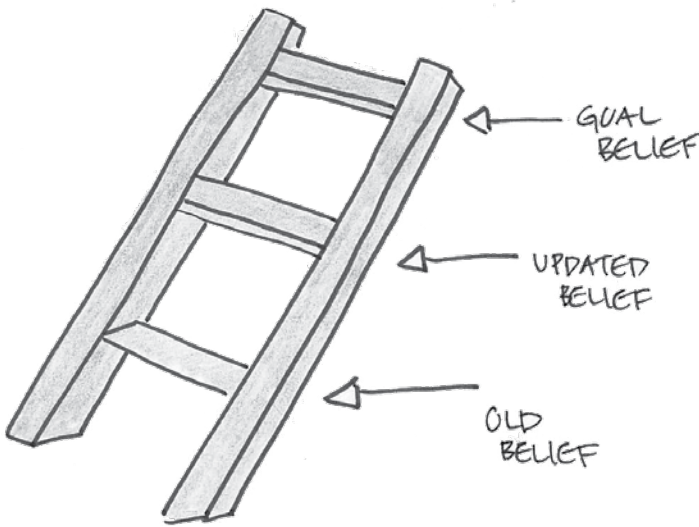
It never works out.

I'll never get over this.

I'll always be alone.

Review all the beliefs that you've circled. Choose one to work on for this exercise and create a ladder for that belief. Turn the idea from hurtful to helpful.

1. In the first rung, write down your old, unhelpful belief. Ask yourself: Is this belief 100 percent true 100 percent of the time? Chances are the belief isn't absolutely true. It's important you realize this on your own so you can see that the assumption is not a hard fact, and what you used to believe can now change.
2. In the second rung, update your belief with an assumption that is more honest and helpful. Think of a few examples of how this updated belief is true (either find evidence that perhaps you've overlooked in the past or think of scenarios where this might prove true in the future). Your updated belief should be one that pushes you just outside of your comfort zone, but not so far that you don't believe it.
3. In the third rung, write down your goal—what you aspire to believe so that you can ultimately create the life and love you want. You may not be there now, and perhaps you can't even fathom how you'll get there, and that's okay. You're writing this down so you have something to work toward. You can also add rungs in between to get you more and more ready to reach the top of the ladder.



Rung 3:

Rung 2:

Rung 1:

Rung 1: What I used to believe (your old belief).

Rung 2: What I believe now (your updated belief).

Rung 3: What I aspire to believe (your goal).

Post this new, updated belief somewhere where you can see it often. Make it your phone screensaver, put it on a sticky note on your bathroom mirror, or repeat it as a daily mantra. Seek out examples of it being true. When you start to experience change, there's a positive feedback loop, which starts the process of rewiring.

EXERCISE: Visualize Your New Belief

Let's use visualization techniques to shift our beliefs about our relationships. The intention of this exercise is to imagine yourself with the updated belief you created in the ladder exercise and visualize how you feel and act differently in your environment. For example, if your belief started at "I am always rejected" and evolved to "I'm open to meeting new people and will lead with curiosity in my interactions," you might imagine yourself talking to someone at a party, asking questions, smiling, and experiencing the positive feelings of building rapport. Or if your belief changed from "I can't trust anyone" to "There are some people I can trust some of the time," summon the feelings of warmth when you are with someone you know you can count on. Perhaps instead of your arms crossed, you have more relaxed and open body language. Whatever your updated belief, this is a practice of playing with possibility and visualizing how your experience changes.

Take the new updated belief you created in the ladder exercise. Next, find a quiet spot and get grounded by doing deep breathing. Close your eyes and imagine yourself walking into a room with your updated belief. How are you standing? What is your facial expression?

Visualize the entire scene. Who's there with you? What's the expression on their face? How are people responding to your energy differently? What are the colors, the smells, the sounds? Run through the scenario as if it's happening right now and you are experiencing it firsthand. Now, check in with how you feel. What are the emotions coming up? Don't forget to smile. Feel gratitude for this moment. Really let it soak in, along with the feelings associated with this new belief. Feel in your body that without a doubt this is your reality. When you're completely immersed, slowly open your eyes.

According to Dr. Dispenza, once we immerse ourselves in the

scene of what we want to create, using imagination to evoke how we would feel as if we're experiencing it in real time, changes begin to take place in our brain.¹²

Each time we do this, we're laying down new neurological tracks (in the present moment) that literally change our brain to look like the brain of our future. In other words, the brain starts to look like the future we want to create has already happened.

Dr. Joe Dispenza

By visualizing and mentally rehearsing how you'd engage differently with your updated belief, you've created new neural pathways in your brain. Now, the more you repeat and practice, the more you strengthen that new pathway.

Exercise: Name It to Tame It

In this exercise we are going to determine to which emotions you may be addicted. Once we understand this, we can bring awareness to the past experiences that imprinted these emotions and learn how to hack the loop.

PART 1

Reflect on your last few relationships. If you've had only one relationship, you can stick to that one. Write down the three emotions you felt consistently in your past relationships. For example, if you were constantly overgiving and not receiving anything back, you might have felt resentful. If you found yourself chasing for more time, more commitment, you might have felt desperate. If you had a lot of fun in your last relationship, perhaps you felt playful. The list doesn't have to just be negative emotions; if you experienced consistent positive emotions, you can include those too. The point of this exercise is to take stock of the patterns of your past emotional experiences.

Three main emotions you felt with ex #1

Three main emotions you felt with ex #2

Three main emotions you felt with ex #3

Reflect on the words—are any repeating? Ask yourself what emotional states you might be addicted to feeling. How might you be participating in creating situations that enable you to keep feeling those emotions? The words that keep coming up are the emotions you are addicted to, dear reader.

PART 2

Circle any unhelpful or negative emotions that repeated throughout your relationships, and choose one to work with. If each relationship brought up different emotions, you can focus on the emotional experience of your most recent relationship.

Using the sentence stem below, write down how you contributed to the emotional experience. In the second sentence, identify how you can stop the emotional experience from repeating in the future. Repeat this sentence stem multiple times to get a full picture of all the ways you're accountable for your emotional experience and the choices you can make to stop the pattern from repeating.

For example:

Repeated feeling: **resentful**

I felt resentful when I kept paying for everything, did all the housework, and kept giving my time and energy without any reciprocation.

To prevent this from happening in the future, I will stop automatically paying for everything and have a conversation about money and boundaries up front.

Your turn:

I felt _____ when _____
_____.

To prevent this from happening in the future, _____
_____.

I felt _____ when _____
_____.

To prevent this from happening in the future, _____
_____.

I felt _____ when _____
_____.

To prevent this from happening in the future _____
_____.

EXERCISE: Name Your Needs

Go through the list below and on the next page and circle all the needs you did NOT receive growing up or felt you had to suppress. This can provide insight on the needs that you are more sensitive to and need more of as an adult.

Common Emotional Needs

Connection:

acceptance	consistency	security
affection	cooperation	stability
appreciation	empathy	support
belonging	inclusion	to be understood
closeness	intimacy	to know and be known
communication	love	to see and be seen
community	mutuality	trust
companionship	nurturing	warmth
compassion	respect/self-respect	
consideration	safety	

Physical Well-Being:

food
 movement/exercise
 rest/sleep
 safety
 sexual expression
 shelter
 touch

Honesty:

authenticity
 integrity
 presence

Play:

humor
 joy

Peace:

beauty
 communion
 ease
 equality
 harmony
 inspiration
 order

Autonomy:

choice
 freedom
 independence
 space
 spontaneity

Meaning:

awareness
 celebration of life
 challenge
 clarity
 competence
 consciousness
 contribution
 creativity
 discovery
 effectiveness
 efficacy
 growth
 hope
 learning
 mourning
 participation
 purpose
 self-expression
 stimulation
 to matter
 understanding

Next, in your journal, use the following prompts to evaluate your current or most recent relationship in light of those needs.

- How did you react as a child to having these unmet needs met?
- Reflect on your last romantic relationship(s). Write down all the needs your ex(es) did not fulfill. What actions did you take to get these unmet needs met?
- What are the parallels? What are the contradictions? How have the unmet needs of your childhood affected your adult relationships?
- How are you attempting to get your needs met now? How do you react when they aren't met? Is this serving you?

For every unmet need that is causing pain or discomfort today, list ways you can meet those needs yourself. This does not mean you must have all your needs met in isolation. Brainstorm different sources where you can start meeting your needs. For example, if connection is an important need for you, the following action items are examples of how to create a sense of connection within yourself:

For example:

Need: **connection**

I can get my need for connection met by incorporating a daily guided meditation on self-compassion and abundance (connection with self).

I can get my need for connection met by having dinner with girlfriends once a week (connection with friends).

I can get my need for connection met by doing one act of random kindness each day (connection with humanity).

I can get my need for connection met by signing up for a dance class with friends even though it's out of my comfort zone (connection with self and community).

I can get my need for connection met by joining a women's group or book club (connection with community).

Your turn:

I can get my need for _____ met by _____
_____.

I can get my need for _____ met by _____
_____.

I can get my need for _____ met by _____
_____.

I can get my need for _____ met by _____
_____.

I can get my need for _____ met by _____
_____.

Being responsible for meeting your needs doesn't mean that you can't or won't be in a relationship where you and your partner mutually support, respect, and honor each other's needs. Whether you're single, coupled, or anything in between, ultimately, you're responsible for communicating your needs, limits, and boundaries. Next we're going to learn how to do this in a healthy way.

WOUNDED CHILD (AGES 0–5)	ADAPTED ADOLESCENT (AGES 6–18)	FUNCTIONING ADULT
<p><i>Feels less than (inferior)</i></p> <p><i>Has no boundaries</i></p> <p><i>Acts needy</i></p> <p><i>"I am bad"</i></p>	<p><i>Feels more than (superior)</i></p> <p><i>Puts up walls</i></p> <p><i>Acts needless</i></p> <p><i>Reacts by criticizing, attacking, or indulging</i></p> <p><i>"You are bad"</i></p>	<p><i>Feels equal to others (people are not more or less than)</i></p> <p><i>Sets limits and healthy boundaries</i></p> <p><i>Communicates needs</i></p> <p><i>Fully present and responsible in reality</i></p> <p><i>Accepts imperfections</i></p>

EXERCISE: Tame the Shame

Moving through shame is a process of sharing with others and experiencing empathy. When we have difficult experiences that leave us feeling flawed or unworthy, we need the support and empathy of others most. Studies show that empathy decreases stress levels and improves physical and mental health.⁶ The following exercise provides steps on how to move through shame in positive ways.

1. Notice what brings up your feelings of shame. This can be challenging at first because our feelings might be buried under layers of coping mechanisms. You can start by looking at your reactions to shame—what are the behaviors and urges that come up when you feel this uncomfortable emotion? Do you isolate? Withdraw? Attack? Blame? Write these down so you can identify your tendencies. Recognize that we use blame to discharge discomfort, anger, and pain.
2. How does shame feel in the body? There is a physiological response to every emotion. Bring attention to your body and simply observe any numbness or sensation. You don't need to do anything with it, just observe and be.
3. Use introspection to start uncovering what you feel shame around and the stories you've created that cause your shame. Evaluate how you judge others, as there's often key information about what we disown or dislike about ourselves by looking at what we judge others for.
4. Practice self-compassion. Start by recognizing that you are not your shame and that many of your shame-inducing experiences happened when you were a child. Feelings of insignificance and

unworthiness appeared before you had any “choices” in the matter. Shame was your natural response. You cannot deny or escape your shame experiences, but to move through shame means to face the feelings, own them, and incorporate them into yourself.

5. In your journal, write down a current situation that you feel shame around. Write in detail and don't hold back. This is your chance to get it out of your system and onto paper as a way of release. Set the story of shame free.
6. Who is someone you can trust to share what you're feeling? Choose someone who you know will not reject you for sharing your vulnerability. Then ask this person if she will hold space for you to share something you've felt shame around and want to release. Offer some parameters to the person on how to best support you while you do this exercise. Remind her that you're not seeking advice; you just need someone to listen with compassion and without judgment. If nobody comes to mind, consider empathetic settings such as twelve-step support meetings or women's groups, or seek out a therapist or coach. Sharing the issues you feel shame around with someone that you know won't reject you is a crucial step for reducing shame's power.

EXERCISE: Connect the Dots

Think about a time in your life when something didn't go according to plan and, as a result, something even better happened. Perhaps it was being let go from a job only to find a higher-paying, more fulfilling one. Or maybe it was the horrible breakup that helped you learn key lessons about yourself and finally gave you the courage to move out of your hometown. Write down three unexpected "plot twists" that ultimately resulted in something positive.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

EXERCISE: Play with Possibility

In this exercise, identify what didn't go according to plan and brainstorm how this might open up another door for you in the future. Imagine yourself five years from today, looking back at how one thing didn't go according to plan only for something else to work out. We are playing with possibility here, so fast-forward to future you and connect the dots.

For example, if your plan was to get married by age X, think about future you, five years from now. Perhaps she's in a healthy relationship with an amazing human. Perhaps she also started a coaching practice to help women through heartbreak. Here's mine, as an example:

My plan was to get married to Adam. Instead, I started a company to help people with their heartbreaks, published a book, and am now in a loving, healthy relationship.

Use your imagination here! Even if you have no idea how that would happen, or it seems unrealistic right now, just play with possibility. Be creative and get wild; don't hold back!

My plan was _____.
Instead, _____.

My plan was _____.
Instead, _____.

My plan was _____.
Instead, _____.

Exercising your mind to see the possibilities of your new future is part of the practice of letting go. It helps you get unstuck from the past and redirect your focus to future possibilities. This practice helps you in your process of creating closure.

EXERCISE: The Letting Go Letter

Write a letter to someone who you want to let go of. You might not be ready to write a letter to your ex right now, and that's okay. You can choose someone with whom you've had unfinished business. This is an exercise you can repeat and work yourself up to writing a letter to your ex. Accept, find the lesson, forgive, generate gratitude. *Just let go.*

Choose some stationery and your favorite pen. Find somewhere quiet and play music in the background that feels inspiring. Follow the prompts below to write your letter.

And when you're finished, rip up that letter or set it on fire.

- **"This is what happened."** Describe the facts of the situation. Be accurate, recounting both the positives and negatives without embellishment, interpretation, or judgment.
- **"This is how I felt/feel."** Without accusatory language, be honest about how you felt/feel. Your feelings are not right or wrong; they are simply your experience.
- **"This is what I take accountability for."** Even if it seems like the other person was at fault completely, the fact is every relationship takes two people. Victimization does not help you. Take accountability for your part in the situation.
- **"This is what I forgive."** Even if it hurts, forgive. Find compassion that your ex was trying the best he knew how at the time. Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself.
- **"This is what I let go."** The pain, the regret, the negative charge, the blame—let it go. You're done ruminating on the past and committing to letting go of what no longer serves you.

- **“This is what I learned.”** Illuminate your personal power. See the strength and courage you’ve gained from the situation and that while you may have been bruised, you’re not broken.
- **“This is what I’m grateful for.”** Give thanks to the person or the situation for providing the chance for you to grow.

Closure is not something you attain; it’s the compound effect of a process that encompasses grieving, acceptance, accountability, letting go, forgiveness, and gratitude.

EXERCISE: The Stop Sign

(Stop Future Trippin' Before Takeoff)

The building of a relationship takes time. It takes gradual exchanges of vulnerability and sharing—in person. It's a dance. And as two people get to know each other, rapport builds and you become closer and closer. To help you stay present with your current partner, here's an exercise to try the next time your mind starts to wander into the future.

Once the thought creeps up—you imagine a trip you want to take, your destination wedding, living together in a two-story house—catch yourself. Create awareness that your mind is not being present.

Next, imagine a big red stop sign, or say the word “stop” out loud.

If you can, change your body position (if you're sitting down, stand up, and vice versa). Or if possible, go for a walk. It's much easier to get your mind to change when you change your physiology first.

Now, start looking around and observing the things you're grateful for. Be keenly observant. Notice the sky, the trees, the beautiful environment around you, the weather—notice everything and anything and find the gratitude within.

Once you focus your attention on listing off all you're grateful for, your mind will automatically lose track of its grip on the previous thought. Soon you'll forget what you were originally thinking about.

This might be tough the first few times, but with practice, you'll master this! While a daily gratitude ritual helps you rewire your brain for happiness, the stop sign exercise is an in-the-moment hack to help you redirect your thoughts in order to stay present.

QUIZ: Do You Have Love Addiction?

ANSWER YES OR NO TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

1. I tend to feel needy in my romantic relationships.
2. I fall in love very quickly.
3. I have a tendency to stay in a relationship even though I know it's unhealthy or toxic for me.
4. When I have romantic feelings toward someone, I can't stop fantasizing and thinking about him, which sometimes causes a disruption in my daily life.
5. I've been told that I've been smothering in relationships.
6. In the past, when I had romantic feelings toward someone, I have ignored red flags.
7. I find myself investing more into a relationship than my partner.
8. In the past, I've gotten romantically involved with someone to avoid being lonely.
9. I have worked hard to mold myself to the person my partner wants me to be. I will edit myself and sacrifice my needs and values in order to please him.
10. I am petrified of being abandoned. Even the slightest sign of rejection causes me to feel unsafe or worthless.
11. I have more than once chased after people who have rejected me and tried desperately to change their minds.

12. Even if I am not in a relationship, I find myself fantasizing about love all the time—either about someone from my past or about the perfect person who I hope I to meet.
13. I feel powerless when I fall in love, and have a tendency to make unhealthy choices because my feelings are so strong.
14. I need a romantic partner in order to feel okay.
15. I consistently choose partners who are emotionally unavailable or avoid intimacy.
16. When I'm in a relationship, I have a tendency to make the relationship the center of my universe.

If you answered yes to more than 50 percent of these statements, this may be an indicator that you are experiencing love addiction.

These statements are adapted from a questionnaire created by Love Addicts Anonymous. To get a full diagnosis, seek a therapist who specializes in relationship issues or check out resources and programs offered at the Meadows treatment center.

EXERCISE 1: Choose Your Values

Do you have a tendency to stay too long with someone who is not right for you? Or do you tend to discard someone quickly before really giving him a chance? Are you blinded by chemistry and not paying attention to compatibility of values?

Try this exercise to find out.

What are the values that matter to you? Review the list below and on the next page and circle your top ten. Once you're clear on your values, you have a good starting point for the values you want in a partner.

Which are the ten values that are most important to you?

Achievement/

Accomplishment:

advancement
building something
challenge
competence
competition
creating beauty
creating change
creating information
efficiency
entrepreneurship
excellence
expertise
innovation

Justice:

autonomy
democracy
diversity
equality
fairness
leadership
teamwork

Courage:

adventure
authenticity
excitement/risk
honesty
independence
perseverance
self-expression
self-respect
tenacity
zest

Positive Emotion:

fun
gratitude
joy
leisure
play

Safety:

financial security
physical security
stability

Humanity:

altruism
belonging to a group
care
collaboration
compassion
connection
cooperation
country
family
freedom
friendships
helping others
kindness
listening
love
social intelligence

Status:

fame
getting recognition
influencing people
sophistication
wealth

Temperance:

balance
 conscientiousness
 eco-consciousness
 forgiveness
 harmony
 health
 humility
 integrity
 order
 physical activity
 prudence
 respect
 responsibility
 self-regulation
 tradition

Transcendence:

awe
 faith
 hope
 humor
 inspiration
 serenity
 spirituality
 time in nature
 wonder

Wisdom:

arts
 creativity
 curiosity
 decision-making
 decisiveness
 discernment
 exploring/research
 love of learning
 meaning in life
 meaningful work
 perspective
 self-awareness
 self-development
 self-realization

Write down those top ten values that are important to you in column one of the worksheet opposite. In the next column, rate yourself from 0 (not at all) to 10 (fully expressed in this value) according to where you think you score in terms of these values. Now, in chronological order, assess the last three relationships or love interests you've had and rate how they score according to these values.

How do your past partners score in comparison to you? Are you scoring above 70 yourself? If not, is it realistic for you to want a partner who scores 100 when you yourself are not there? For example, if you value generosity but you yourself are calculative, have a tit-for-tat approach, and live in a scarcity mindset, is it realistic or fair that you expect your partner to be generous when you are not?

Is each partner getting closer to your values or further from them? If you've typically been a slave to chemistry, the next time

you evaluate if you want to invest in a romantic partner, cross-check with this list. If you find that he is scoring low on compatibility, save yourself the months (if not years) of a relationship that will eventually combust.

	VALUE	ME	NAME	NAME	NAME
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
SCORE					

EXERCISE 2: Identifying Healthy Love

Now, take stock of what unhealthy love relating is. (It's not love because it was never love in the first place.) If you're reading this book, it's likely because you've had a history of unhealthy connections;

hence, you now know that what you thought was love wasn't. Next, write down a list of what healthy love and support feels like. If you don't have romantic examples from your life, see if you can find examples of feeling love from friends or family members. Let's take a look at Sheena's list. Sheena came to Renew Breakup Bootcamp months after her divorce from an emotionally abusive man was finalized.

Sheena's List

UNHEALTHY RELATING IS:

- *Emotional unavailability*
- *Verbal abuse*
- *Criticism of every aspect of my life*
- *Calculative—taking note of every transaction
(including \$2.75 for the subway)*
- *Controlling (for example, I was not allowed to use “his knife”
and had to buy my own for cooking)*
- *Not being prioritized*

When asked to write her list for healthy love, she wasn't able to come up with anything based on actual experience. She had no idea what healthy love was because she had not experienced it from her parents or romantic partners.

As a starting point, Sheena reflected on how love and support felt like when she was with her most trusted friends. She was then able to craft a list of her ideas of what healthy love could look like.

HEALTHY LOVE IS:

- *Patience*
- *Boundaries are respected*

- *Honesty*
- *Kindness*
- *Open and direct communication*
- *Compromise*
- *Stability*
- *Showing up and being supportive*

Sheena had to start from ground zero, piecing together what healthy love looks like, since most of what she's experienced romantically has been the opposite.

Now it's your turn.

Unhealthy Relating Is:

Healthy Love Is:

Start here. Embrace the difference on a cerebral level so that you can start recognizing healthy love on an experiential level. With

awareness as the first step, the second step is to stop choosing people who show signs of emotional dysfunction.

As you continue adjusting your chemistry compass and choose partners who are healthier, you may run into another hurdle. You might meet someone whom you have both chemistry and compatibility with, but then face a blockage that renders you unable to receive his love. And it happens to the most giving of us.

EXERCISE: Start by Accepting Compliments

When someone compliments you, do you deflect, downplay, disagree, or minimize? For example, if someone says, “I love your outfit!” do you respond with “Oh, this old thing? Got it on sale.” Or if someone provides positive feedback: “You were great in that presentation today!” do you reply, “Ugh, really? I was so nervous and rushed through the opening.”

The next time someone compliments you, resist your urge to downplay and deflect. Instead, follow these steps:

- Pause to take the words in
- Listen to what’s being said
- Feel the love and positivity behind them
- Articulate your thanks and accept the compliment

Even if you don’t want to receive the compliment, the first step is saying “thank you.” Give yourself permission to feel the discomfort. The more you practice, the easier it becomes. Soon, compliments will even feel good!

EXERCISE: Notice Your Tendency to Give Back Right Away to “Balance Things Out”

How do you respond when someone gives you something? Is your inclination to immediately return the favor in order to keep balance? Your practice for the next week is to simply accept whatever gift, favor, or compliment comes your way. Sure, you’ll probably feel the urge to give back, but resist and relish in the feelings of just receiving.

Remind yourself that you are worthy of receiving. In the words of Renew's tantra coach, Lauren Harkness, "It's generous to receive." Give someone the opportunity to give to you. That is a gift in itself.

EXERCISE: Make a List

You are now familiar with the power of cultivating gratitude and journaling. Using these tools, keep track of all the receiving you experience on a daily basis. This will help you notice how much you're actually getting from others and thus grow your capacity for doing so. So, for the next week, keep a journal of every time you receive something. This could be as simple as a stranger opening a door for you, a compliment from a coworker, or a favor from a friend. The purpose of this exercise is to create awareness around receiving.

EXERCISE: One Week of Asks

For the next seven days, your practice is to ask someone to help you. Depending on how comfortable you already are asking/receiving, you can ease into this by starting with small asks and gradually increase the size of ask. Here are some examples:

Low

(low commitment from the person who is helping, instant/completed quickly):

- At the grocery store, ask a staff member to help you with picking out the perfect squash.
- On the subway, ask a stranger for their seat if your feet are aching.

Medium

(medium commitment, requires some time/effort):

- Ask someone if you can borrow a book (or another practical item).
- Ask someone to bring a dish to the dinner party you're hosting.

High

(higher commitment, requires someone to make effort—what you might consider “going out of their way”—in order to help you):

- Ask a friend if she would be willing to hop on a phone call with you to work through a job-related problem.
- Ask a love interest to help you fix something in your home that is broken.

Balancing giving and receiving is an art form. As we've discussed, it takes practice and time: the discomfort of asking for what you want starts to fade, and being able to receive without guilt or doubt eventually becomes more natural.

EXERCISE: Bring the Shadow into the Light

Take out your journal. This writing exercise is to help you explore your shadows. Your shadows are the parts of you that you hide—your insecurities, your trauma, your wounds, your darkness. The longer we suppress and hide those parts of ourselves, the harder they become to access. Sometimes, in a subconscious effort to restore balance, those parts express themselves in unhealthy ways. Let's bring them into the light.

PART 1: THE WARM-UP

As you ponder the following questions, look for common themes and patterns that you experienced growing up. The prompts are to help you explore how and why you adapted certain ideas around what you “should” and “shouldn’t” be.

- What was the first/predominant message you were taught about sex and sexuality growing up? Was the topic discussed with openness, or were you taught that sex was bad or sinful? Reflect on the messages that you may have absorbed from your family, culture, and society around sexuality growing up and how that has affected your relationship with sexuality today.
- Who did you have to be for your mother growing up? Who did you have to be for your father? How did that shape who you are today?
- Are there sides of you that you didn't feel safe to express as a child? In past relationships? Were there parts of you that you felt shame around and had to hide?

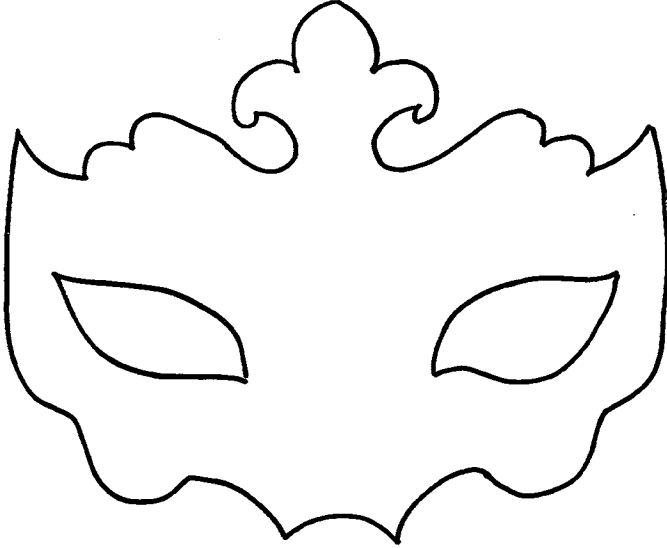
Go to a blank page in your journal. Set a timer for ten minutes. Commit to writing without taking your pen off the paper, and let anything that comes to mind flow as words onto the page. Are you ready? The prompt is: “The truth I’ve been hiding is . . .”

As we’ve learned previously about shame, the more we hide, the more shame grows. Shame has power over us as long as we continue to bury it. To complete this exercise, think of someone you can trust, who you know will not reject you for telling the truth. Read your journal entry to this person.

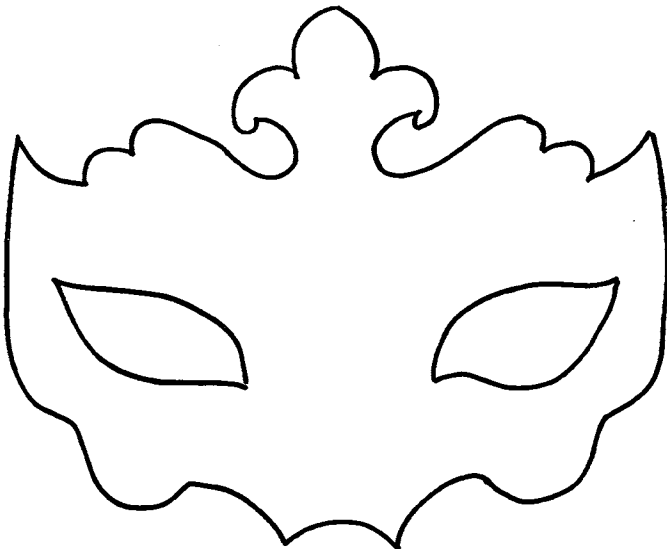
PART 2: THE MASK

Did you grow up with an idea of who and how you “should” be? Whether this idea was crafted from the expectations of parents, cultural norms, or societal pressures, chances are there’s an image in your head around this, and the parts of you that don’t fit into that picture have been suppressed, hidden, or edited.

On the mask below, write down words to describe the person who you've learned that you "should" be. This is the mask you wear for the world—the "you" that is expected.



Next, write down words to describe parts of you that you've hidden, parts that want to be expressed. Maybe they completely contradict the side that you have been showing to the world.



Now it's time to pick a Domme name. This is your fully expressed self. She is all the things you've ever wanted to be, all your sides. Choose a name that encapsulates her. Using the outline below, write adjectives that describe her. Some of the words may contradict—that's perfectly okay! Be bold and unafraid to describe your integrated self, uninhibited, fully expressed—the you that is inside you, wanting to come out. Bring her to life below.



PART 3: VISUALIZE YOUR INNER DOMME IN ACTION

1. Recall a scenario in the past in which you felt you lost your power. What happened, and most important, how did you react? Picture yourself: How were you standing? What was the expression on your face? How did your voice sound? How did you feel?
2. Use your imagination to envision your Domme self. How does she live, express love, and connect to others? How does she handle rejection? How does she walk into a room? How does she get what she wants? How does she handle boundaries?

3. Now, close your eyes and revisit the scenario you described in number 1. How would your Domme self handle that same situation? Replay the scenario in your head, but this time, approach the situation as a fully realized, powerful Domme.

My challenge to you is to channel your inner Domme at least once a day. Maybe you're at a restaurant and you get the wrong order, and your "should-be" self doesn't want to cause inconvenience. That's the moment you channel your inner Domme. What would she do in that situation? Channel her when you need some extra oomph to draw boundaries, ask for what you want, walk taller, flirt with the handsome guy next to you on the train—any situation where you want to draw out your fierce, raw, sensual, confident, playful, powerful self. She's in you. You just need to let her out. She's begging you to release her.

Make a yes, no, maybe list. Before you negotiate what you want sexually, it's helpful if you have clarity on what you want and don't want. What's a fuck yes? What's sexy, fun, and hot to you? What's a fantasy you want to explore? Write it down. What's an absolute no? Write it down. What's in your maybe list? This is a possibility, perhaps something novel and exciting, that can be explored in the right context. Amy Jo advises that if it's a maybe, it's a no for right now, because a maybe is not a full-on yes. When it's not a full-on yes, that's when people end up regretting their sexual experiences, letting themselves sway into a yes when it wasn't, and feeling badly after. This list is something you should review regularly. You might try something on your yes list and decide you don't want to try it again, and it goes on your no list. This list is for you. It's a tool to help you create clarity on how you want to play in your sexual playground. Use the template on the next page created by Amy Jo to map it out.

YES

Things I want to do or like to do sexually/romantically

MAYBE SOMEDAY

Things I've thought
about doing sexually/
romantically but am
unsure

NO

Things I do not want to do sexually/romantically

[illegible]

EXERCISE: Be the Vitamin

Think about three people you love being around. These are “vitamins,” because they make you feel good *and* are good for you. Write down below what you feel when you’re with them and how you feel afterward. Reflect on what they do to make you feel this way. Do they validate your feelings? Do they ask questions and listen carefully? Are they present? Next time you are with these people, pay particular attention to their body language, questions, tone of voice, and any other mannerisms that might contribute to the good feelings you get from your time with them.

Vitamin: _____

Vitamin: _____

Vitamin: _____

Think about three people you dread being around—the “toxins.” You know, the folks who leave you feeling drained, negative, and annoyed. What are the three ideas that pop into your head after you’re with them? What do these people do to agitate you? What do they not do that you wish they would? Do they interrupt? Brag? Dominate a conversation?

Toxin: _____

Toxin: _____

Toxin: _____

For the next week, when you interact with people, be intentional about how you're making them feel. The goal is to leave them feeling how you feel after you spend time with someone who inspires you. Employ the mannerisms and social savvy of those "vitamins" in your life. If you catch yourself exhibiting behaviors of the "toxins," notice them and stop yourself.

At the end of the day, rate yourself in your interactions. Just the act of being aware of how you want someone to feel when they are around you, and assessing what works and doesn't work can help you to build your social mastery.

Remember, being inspiring, radiating positive energy, and being someone whom people want to be around is a skill, and one you can develop. It is also all-encompassing and shouldn't just be saved for potential romantic partners. Put light out into the world, and your whole world will improve, not just your love life.

EXERCISE: Create Your Own Dating Experiment

Being “good” at dating is a skill. This exercise is to help ease you into the dating process so that you can have fun and enjoy the journey even after heartbreak!

Commit to dating three different types of people. The objective is to go outside of where you’ve always gone before—and to not emit a needy, anxious energy about the future. Your next three dates are not meant for you to find “the one.” Your mission, should you choose to accept it:

- If you’ve never done online dating, create a profile and go out on a date.
- Get set up by a matchmaker.
- Date someone who is not your “type.” Maybe he’s shorter than your typical height requirement, he works in an industry you’d normally deem boring, or he’s of a different cultural background.
- Ask your closest friends to suggest someone whom they think you’d be a match with and ask that person out for a coffee.
- If you never initiate, ask someone out on a date.
- If you haven’t had sex in months, find a lover.
- If you’re dating someone, show up one night as your Dominatrix self. Channel her and make a fun evening out of it.
- Go on a date with someone five to ten years younger.
- Go on a date with someone five to ten years older.

Add to this list as it suits your interests and willingness to be adventurous. Remember, you are *experimenting* and *practicing*. Don't put pressure on yourself to feel sparks or meet your future husband; avoid any of the angst-ridden baggage that led to disaster before. And journal your process—this is important! Reflect on your experiences. What upset you, and what inspired you? What did you learn about your needs, desires, and wants? What is closer to how you want to feel or how you don't want to feel? What can you apply moving forward?

EXERCISE: Move Beyond the Confines of Your Mind

1. Stand up straight with your feet together. With your right hand straight in front of you, use your index finger and point straight ahead.
2. Keeping your feet planted on the floor, turn your body clockwise as far as you can and notice where you naturally stop. Make a mental note of where your index finger is pointing to—this is your stop point.
3. Drop your hand and come back around to the starting position, standing straight, with your hands by your sides this time.
4. Close your eyes, and this time, just visualize yourself doing the exact same exercise. Do not move your body; only visualize your index finger reaching out in front of you, twisting clockwise, and, this time, moving past your stop point and going twice as far.
5. Keep your eyes closed, put a smile on your face, and make a mental note of your new stop point and how much farther you were able to turn. Repeat the visualization one more time, from the beginning, this time with your finger reaching even farther.
6. Open your eyes. You should still be in the starting position. Now, do the exercise like you did in the beginning. Standing up straight with your feet together and your index finger pointing straight ahead, physically move your arm and twist to see how far you can go.
7. How much farther did you go?

When we do this exercise at Renew, every person is shocked at how much farther she is able to reach by using visualization. The potential for going farther was there from the start, but we reach only as far as we believe we can go. How often do we do this in our daily lives? How often are our limiting beliefs and doubts keeping us from reaching our fullest potential? Visualization is a helpful technique to move beyond the confines of the mind and into expansion and possibility.

EXERCISE: Manifest Your Perfect Day

Now that we understand the power of visualization, we are going to take it a step further and use visualization as a tool for manifesting. Remember, the key to manifestation is to create the feelings and energetic state as if what you want is already true—it's tapping into the potential that's already there, just like with the arm exercise we did earlier. You want to imagine that what you want is not something that you're trying to get but something that you're living right here and now, and to generate the warm feelings and gratitude that you'd feel.

There are two parts to this exercise. First, you will visualize your perfect day, and once you've mentally rehearsed it, you will write it down.

PART 1

Close your eyes and do some deep breathing to get yourself in a calm, relaxed state. Fast-forward to a year from now. Imagine you are waking up and you're about to have your perfect day. What do you see? Are you by yourself or with a partner? Is there sunlight pouring through the windows? Can you hear the sounds of the ocean? Visualize what's around you: what you hear, what you see, what you smell, what you feel.

Visualize your partner and feel the warm feelings of love and support you share. How do you feel with your partner? Imagine what the

two of you are doing. Play out an experience with your partner that makes you feel everything you dream of feeling, as if it's already true. Embrace this feeling of love. Feel the support, the trust, the peaceful energy.

Now continue visualizing your day. Maybe you go for a walk or head to work. Go through the rest of your perfect day and feel how fulfilled you feel, how loved, how supported; summon all the warm feelings and be excited and thankful for the life you've created.

When you've completed your perfect day, open your eyes.

PART 2

Take out a sheet of paper or use your journal, and on the top of the page, write the date for one year from today. Pretend this is your journal entry a year from now. Recount the visualization you just did, and in first person, write down this perfect day that's just unfolded. Write it in detail, including how you felt. Summon the feelings of warmth, love, and gratitude while you write—just like how you write your gratitude journal.

We do this exercise together on the last day at Renew. The women are encouraged to revisit the letter and use the tool of visualization to bring it to life. On the first anniversary of their retreat, the women open up their journals and share what's come true in their group chat.

EXERCISE: Update Your Story

Chapter by chapter, this book has challenged some of your old perspectives and has taken you through different exercises in order to help you practice the skill of reframing. We started the book with an exercise where you took your ten-point story and refined it to five points, removing the interpretations, assumptions, and cognitive distortions in between.

We know how powerful our stories are in shaping our lives. My intention was for you to begin this book with one story and finish with another—a narrative that serves you now and in your future.

In this last exercise, review the five-point story you wrote from chapter one. This time, you get to add five points. You can choose to add lessons you've learned, perspective shifts, the meaning you've now derived from the breakup, and even possibilities for the future.

In this updated story you're not the victim of what happened. No, in this 2.0 version you are the heroine of an epic adventure. You loved and your heart got bruised, and that catapulted you on a journey to learn about yourself, heal old wounds, and shift limiting beliefs.

When you finish this new story, compare it to the original ten-point story you started with. What do you notice? What has changed?

This was never just about the ex. It was always about you.

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