

★ AWARD - WINNING ★

THIS IS HOW WE HEAL FROM PAINFUL CHILDHOODS:

A Practical Guide for Healing Past
Intergenerational Stress and Trauma



*** Summary edition ***

...ever been a victim of
...gem that this book is." – eBookFairs

ERNEST ELLENDER, PHD



“...like a conversation with a trusted friend or a therapy session... I cannot overstate the importance of this book.”
– *Literary Titan*

“...hard-boiled, hands-on advice for how to mitigate the lasting effects of child abuse.”
– *BlueInk Reviews*



“...an uplifting self-help guide to thriving.”
– *Clarion Reviews*

Did your childhood feel like something you survived instead of enjoyed?

A painful childhood naturally results in many sticky obstacles to adult success, ranging from distrust in others to self-sabotaging thoughts and behaviors.

So how do we catch up and acquire the skills and education that our childhoods neglected to teach us?

Delivered in an encouraging, manageable, step-by-step fashion, **This Is How We Heal from Painful Childhoods** breaks down this monumental task into 20 rules for thriving, each explained through the lens of intergenerational trauma and supported by skill-building exercises.

1ST PLACE WINNER OF SIX BOOK CONTESTS:





- Rule #1 Thrive or survive: You decide.
- Rule #2 Who you are in sympathetic is not who you are in parasympathetic.
- Rule #3 Trauma Lies are just that... LIES! .
- Rule #4 We must slow down to speed up.
- Rule #5 Healing requires training, education, and empathy... for all.
- Rule #6 Control is good... especially good control.
- Rule #7 Remove shame, learn from guilt, show remorse, and build esteem.
- Rule #8 Practice treating yourself in a self-loving and self-respecting fashion.
- Rule #9 The pendulum effect is a natural response to trauma.
- Rule #10 Anger begets anger, violence begets violence, and love begets love.
- Rule #11 We are responsible for the decisions that we are aware of.
- Rule #12 It's us against trauma world.
- Rule #13 Secrets destroy!
- Rule #14 Boundaries are confusing, so keep practicing better boundaries.
- Rule #15 Center of the Universe is not a compliment!
- Rule #16 Overindulgent dynamics are bad... period.
- Rule #17 Addictions = Intimacy Disorders.
- Rule #18 Will versus skill... *both* are necessary.
- Rule #19 It's not a contest. Trauma is just bad... and sad.
- Rule #20 Make it normal.

Rule #1

Thrive or survive: You decide.

Rule summary:

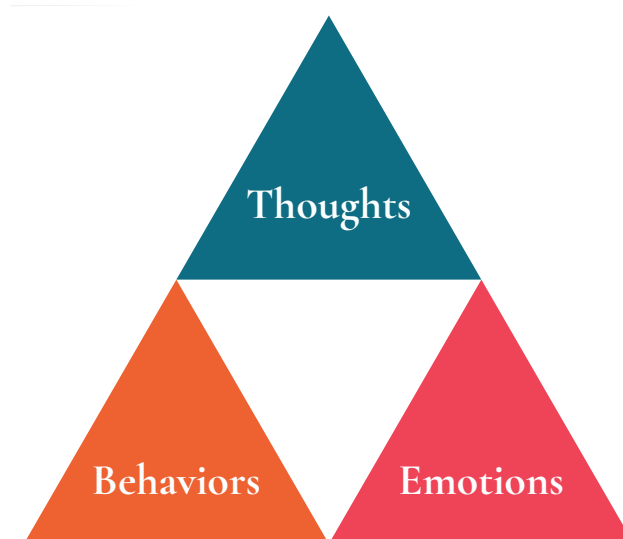
When distracted by the chaos of surviving daily struggles, it can be next to impossible to formulate a clear picture of a thriving life based in stability, positivity, and connection to healthy (enough) people in your life. And yet, taking time to focus on what it would look like to thrive in various areas of your life drastically increases the likelihood of and efficiency towards achieving those circumstances.

- The more precise the picture of success, the easier it is to understand how to get there.
- The more precise the picture of success, the easier it is to identify obstacles to success.

For example: If you are to run a 5K race, you have a much better chance of efficiently completing the race, or even winning the race, if you know where the goal line is! It is hard to move in a positive, purposeful direction without knowing where to go... The more specific the better!

The Cognitive Behavioral Triangle

The cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) triangle is a tremendously useful tool for breaking down any situation into more manageable categories to better assess a given situation, and also to then figure out strategies for improving the situation (intervention). The CBT triangle separates human functioning into three major realms: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional. The cognitive realm includes various thinking processes like decision-making, abstract ideas, memories, education, and attitudes. The behavioral realm includes everything related to the physical world, like our anatomy, genetics, actions we perform with our bodies, money, food, etc. The emotional realm refers to one- or two-word statements describing how we feel: happy, sad, scared, ashamed, etc.



Survivor to Thriver Scales

Major realms of focus



Specific skill sets



Other realms of focus

- Self care
- Family relationships
- Romantic relationships
- Friend relationships
- Financial stability
- Career
- Physical health
- Hobbies and leisure
- Personal development

Other skills & habits to track

- Communication skills
- Thought correction (self-talk) skills
- Behavioral/Mentor parenting
- Nutrition knowledge & habits
- Controlled breathing & muscle relaxation
- Grounding skills
- Healthy technology habits (social media, news media, online dating, pornography)
- Healthy substance use (weekly moderation or abstinence regarding alcohol & drugs)

Survivor to Thriver Scales: Student of Life

Thriving (stable) = 1) Self-soothing skills are mastered and normalized such that anxiety symptoms no longer prevent life activities. 2) Relationships actively support and mutually engage in self-enhancing activities. 3) Self-enhancing pursuits are actively sought out because they are experienced as challenging, confirming, exciting, 4) Goal is to learn and challenge self until death. "S/he who dies with the most knowledge, skills, contributions, and friends wins!"

Professional/Expert

Surviving (advanced) = 1) More functional and stable at work in spite of panic, anxiety, and depression symptoms. 2) Personal relationships marked with reactionary and survivalistic functioning due to 'dangerous' emotional vulnerability of relationship. 3) Hobbies are often isolated from other people. 4) Awareness of there being 'more out there' to learn and experience, but frustrated with inability to achieve / enjoy such pursuits.

Intermediate

Victim=1) Chronic Fight-Flight-Freeze of Sympathetic Nervous System leads to fear based isolation. 2) React emotionally (defensive-offensive) to interactions with people. 3) Focus on survival. 4) Little to no focus on learning, personal growth, upward mobility, personal goals, or therapeutic pursuits.

Novice: Minimal intention to self-improve

Thriving (practice) = 1) Actively maintain daily calm through effective self-soothing skills. 2) Relationships are sufficiently harmonious to encourage self-advancement. 3) Active engagement in several structured therapeutic/educational/experiential pursuits (psychotherapy, Yoga, classes, self-help books, private lessons, etc.). 4) Pursuits often experienced as painful, difficult, stressful. 5) Goal is to finish the pursuit so that you can be done, fixed, happy, complete.

Advanced/Competent

Surviving (barely) = 1) Life activities and progress often interrupted or prevented by panic attacks, fear of people, depression, etc. 2) React emotionally (defensive-offensive) to interactions with people. 3) Stable work is difficult due to constancy of reactionary and Survivalistic thinking.

Advanced beginner



Rule #2

Who you are in sympathetic is not who you are in parasympathetic.

Rule summary:

People's thoughts and behaviors can change drastically from one situation to another, representing a normal variation within one's personality according to momentary moods, company, financial situations, etc.

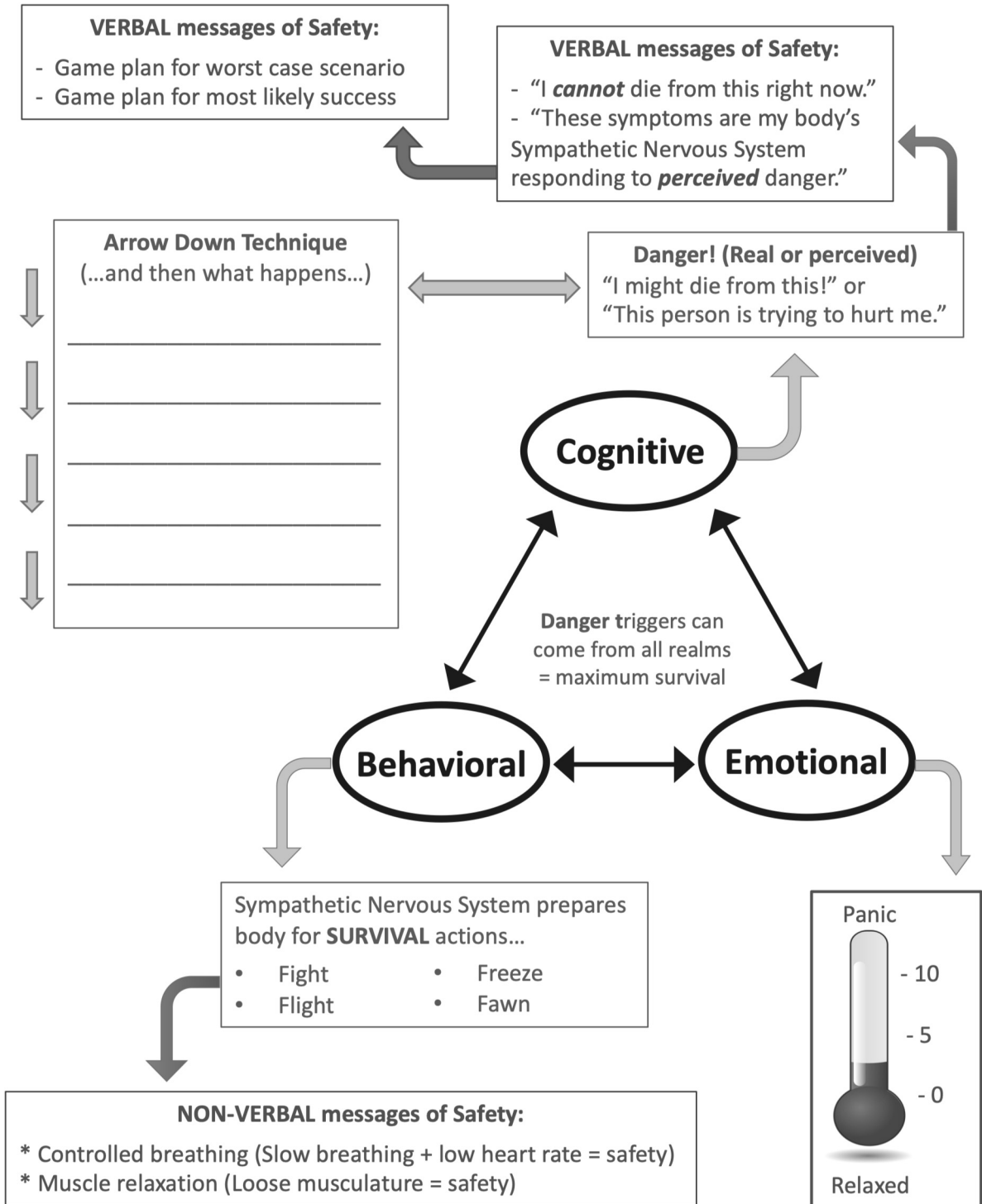
The autonomic nervous system optimizes the body for either the survival response (to dangerous situations) of the sympathetic nervous system or the reparative (rest-and-digest), relaxed state of the parasympathetic nervous system. When the sympathetic nervous system takes over, people generally feel 'amped up', panicky, or fearful, and they tend to respond intensely to their fears. When relaxed in parasympathetic nervous system dominance, on the other hand, the same person tends to be more positive, creative, focused, collaborative, friendly, and happier.

When children encounter prolonged periods of stress (or traumas) throughout childhood, their autonomous nervous system can essentially get stuck in a predominantly sympathetic nervous system state. This leads to the adult person living in deep anxiety, interpersonal fear, and intensely reactive ways.

For example: When hungry, most people purchase a higher quantity of less healthy food options than when they are satiated. The emotional distress of hunger causes more items at the grocery store to look delicious!

Sympathetic nervous system dominant	Parasympathetic nervous system dominant
Primal Brain dominant	Learning Brain dominant
Minute-to-minute reactionary behaviors are part of unplanned fear responses	Daily proactive behaviors are planned & goal-driven
Immediate, concrete environment	Big picture, abstract understanding
Short-term game plans for survival	Long-term game plan for thriving
"Me against the world"	"Me as part of harmonious community"
Self- and Other-destructive counter-attacking	Self- and Other-constructive teamwork

CBT Triangle: How to train for personal “light switch” that shuts down survivor mode and turns on rest-and-digest mode



Rule #3

Trauma Lies are just that... LIES!

Rule summary:

In childhood times of extreme distress, a child's young brain, to the best of its ability, tries to figure out a way do disallow that trauma from recurring, or at least ensure survival the next time it does happen. These survival-focused guidelines we call Trauma Lies: distorted and ultimately destructive attitudes and behaviors learned through personal or intergenerational trauma.

These Trauma Lies guide individuals for the rest of their lives in ways that prevent healthy, happy, secure, and loving relationships. That is, unless the adult survivor is able to identify their Trauma Lies so that they can focus on systematically replacing them with Life Truths.

For example: If a boy is physically abused by his mother, his Trauma Lie can become, "Women will hurt me." In his adult relationships, this deep-seated belief will prevent him from experiencing true vulnerability, trust, and mature love in his intimate relationships with females. While he may have many positive female friends or acquaintances, when conflict arises in moments of vulnerability, his Trauma Lie surfaces and his defensive survival mode kicks into overdrive.

Trauma Lies, Cognitive Distortions, and Life Truths

Trauma memory: At 9 years of age, father died of overdose

Trauma Lie category	Trauma Lie	Cognitive distortions supporting Trauma Lie	Life Truth
Manner in which the trauma occurred.	"Important people can be ripped away at any moment."	Fortune Telling Mental Filter Emotional Reasoning	"A stable, healthy (enough) lifestyle will likely lead to a long life before succumbing to death as part of nature."
Nature of the abuser (or perpetrator of traumatic experience).	"Dad chose drugs over me."	Mind Reading Mental Filter All-or-Nothing Thinking	"Addictions hijack the human brain and impair decision-making. Dad loved me, but was lost in his addiction."
Behaviors learned to survive.	"I must save others from themselves to keep loved ones in my life."	Mental Filter Fortune Telling "Should" Statements Blame Game (Personalization)	"In order to survive, I can hold myself accountable for my responsibilities, and choose others who do the same."
Failure of those who are supposed to love and protect.	"Those who are supposed to love and protect me will eventually abandon me."	Fortune Telling Mental Filter Overgeneralizing	"Some people are unstable and unhealthy, yet others are healthy (enough) to enjoy stable, intimate relationships with."
Nature of Self in relation to Others and the world.	"I am not enough to keep important others in my life."	Labeling Emotional Reasoning Disqualifying the Positive	"I am ultimately lovable, and can bring an abundance of net positive contributions to intimate relationships."

Rule #4

We must slow down to speed up.

Rule summary:

Early in therapy when trying to slow down to address individual issues, I have heard from many survivors of childhood trauma: “I don’t have time to slow down. I need help now! There are too many fires to put out... too close to divorce... too intense a situation... too much chaos...”

As they began to recognize their own state of functioning in chronic daily survival mode and repeating generations of unhealthy family dynamics, clients began to acknowledge that their chaotic life issues would never be resolved with any one simple action. The fact was that for successful intergenerational trauma recovery, they would need to exit their daily panic mode and develop a foundation of personal stability.

As with most rules, we start with a simple rule, formula, or guiding concept, and then we practice applying it in increasingly complex and challenging situations. For rule #4, we start training the 1-2-3 Breathe-Plan-Do! formula.

The short and easy explanation is that we can drastically improve our global functioning and success by learning to systematically switch from *reacting* to our automatic thoughts and environmental cues to instead *slowing down* enough to consciously and purposefully choose to *act according to personal goals and principles*. Sounds easy, right?!

Learning how to voluntarily shut down a survivor’s chronic, hyper-responsive sympathetic nervous system is anything but easy! For most who accept the challenge, they develop this initial and foundational skill over their first year of focused training on *self-soothing* and *emotion regulation* skills like: controlled breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation, grounding, healthy distraction, aromatherapy, self-care, etc.

Drills & skills: Slow down... everything.

Set alarms to go off on your phone or smartwatch every hour throughout the day. This includes your morning routine, work hours, and after-hours during leisure time. If you can personalize the words that come up on the screen, have it read:

“Breathe. Slow down. Think.”

Try this drill for a week, then take a one-week break before doing another week. Ideally, alternate weeks for roughly three months. You will be amazed at how this exercise enhances your various performances, work productivity, decision-making, mood throughout the day, and even leisure activities! One of the greatest benefits of slowing everything down is that you will likely feel like you are removing yourself from the ‘rat race’ of modern life.

Breathe – Plan – Do! Formula

1 – Breathe until your parasympathetic nervous system is thoroughly activated. While focusing on achieving and maintaining parasympathetic mode, declare the following:

“I will not react to this situation. Instead, I will act according to my personal principles and goals. I acknowledge that my thoughts are distorted, likely in support of underlying Trauma Lies that will misguide any reactive thinking. I will slow down to make my thoughts more accurate and to integrate my Life Truths purposefully into my thinking and decisions.”

***If struggling with denial or self-doubt, remind yourself of the following empathic truth:

“No one is capable of perfectly objective and rational thinking; everyone’s thoughts are distorted. My thoughts may be exceptionally distorted as a natural consequence of my past traumas.”

2 – Plan. Utilize your Learning Brain to devise actionable game plans based on thriving goals and principles.

“If this Life Truth is indeed true, then it would lead someone to behave in _____ fashion.”

Game plan option #1

Game plan option #2

Mentally rehearse your best game plan. Select which game plan offers the best forward movement. Sit still, breathe, and imagine yourself running through each step of your game plan. Imagine likely obstacles that may surface, and include strategies for overcoming these obstacles. Finish with imagining the successful execution of your game plan.

3 – Do...any behavior that offers movement towards thriving goals! Remember that *any* action is vastly better *no* action. It is far more encouraging to say, “I have started this process,” instead of, “I really need to eventually do something.” Do *any* part of your best game plan option to get started.

Rule #5

Healing requires training, education, and empathy... for all.

Rule summary:

Learning the differences between training, education, and empathy can help Survivors adopt the wisdom in Ralph Waldo Emerson's words, "Life is a journey, not a destination." With this mindset, Survivors can slow down to appreciate the growth itself instead of trying to hurry through the healing process to achieve some mythical destination where no work is necessary ever again. Keep learning, training, growing, challenging yourself... and enjoy it.

Training means learning or teaching the skills, knowledge, and competency needed for a particular job or activity. This happens predominantly in the behavioral realm of human functioning and involves repetitive behaviors done to acquire complex skills. In intergenerational trauma recovery, training means developing competency in a broad range of personal and interpersonal skills for thriving within family, social, and occupational relationships and challenges. That is a lot of training!

Education is receiving novel information through systematic instruction (versus coaching for training), typically in a school-type setting. Regarding C-PTSD, education refers to a body of important information about trauma that belongs predominantly in the cognitive realm of human functioning. Survivors use this information to better understand the world of trauma dynamics and guide cognitive decision-making processes that eventually lead to purposeful behavioral changes. Though education alone doesn't fix everything, it makes a world of difference.

Empathy is the ability to understand and feel the emotional experiences of another human being. Learning about a child's natural responses to trauma helps Survivors invite empathy into their inner world, for both their adult self and the traumatized child of their youth. This skill of empathizing with the self and others is necessary for maximal thriving. Offering empathy strictly for others (but not the self) fosters a subconscious self-sacrifice that removes the ability to ultimately connect with others. Empathy strictly for the self but not others can present as either narcissism or an entrenched Victim mindset. Both one-way approaches (empathy for only self or only others) lead to more separation from other human beings, but empathy for both the self and others leads to greater global connectivity!

Advanced, collaborative communication skills present an example of a complex and critical interpersonal skill that requires both education and significant training, eventually resulting in significantly improved ability to empathize with both the self and others. Get started with the Communication Cheat Sheet below.

The Communication Cheat Sheet

Listen Actively

- 1 - Try to fully understand what your counterpart is thinking and feeling.
- 2 - Ask questions to clarify.
- 3 - Manage your own defensiveness; be aware of your body language.
- 4 - Do not judge, accuse, or label the other person.

Summarize

- 1 - Summarize what your counterpart has said, “What I’m hearing you say is...”
- 2 - Avoid putting words in their mouth.
- 3 - Verify that you heard them correctly, “Was my summary correct?” Your counterpart has the final say on whether your summary was correct.
- 4 - Imagine that you are acting solely as a mirror to reflect your counterpart’s words back to them.

Acknowledge

- 1 - Avoid the common mistake, “I am 100% right, and you are 100% wrong,” by finding common ground and learning from your counterpart’s viewpoints.
- 2 - Agree with something your counterpart said. If you cannot find anything to agree with...try harder!
- 3 - Acknowledge the basic facts of the situation supporting their viewpoint.
- 4 - Validate their emotional experience (even if they got all the facts wrong).
- 5 - Acknowledge changes in your thinking that your counterpart’s viewpoint has helped bring about.

Tip for transition from Receptive to Expressive phase...no buts allowed! Avoid, “I agree with you here, but...” This is like saying, “Now let me tell you what I really think...” Instead, use and: “I agree with you on these points... And, now let me share my thoughts with you...”

Respond

- 1 - Respond with your own feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and requests.
- 2 - Do not preach or recommend behaviors, “You need to...You should be...”
- 3 - Express yourself directly and respectfully in the following order:
 - a) I feel... (One to two word feelings)
 - b) I think... (Thoughts that go with each feeling: “I feel ___ because I think ___”)
 - c) My long term goal for us is... (For the relationship)
 - d) What I would like from you to help us achieve this long term goal is... (Make direct, measurable, reasonable requests).
 - e) I am willing to offer _____ to help us achieve this long term goal.

Decide

- 1 - Based on the person’s response, decide on most appropriate next step:
 - a) Disengage. Leave the situation. Schedule follow-up discussions if appropriate.
 - b) Repeat the above cycle if progress appears possible in the moment.
 - c) Ask for support and assistance from appropriate sources. Schedule follow-up discussions if appropriate.

Rule #6

Control is good... especially good control.

Rule summary:

Every child is a born manipulator... just ask their parents! Children instinctively cry, cuddle, request, pout, sneak, lie, hide, smile, and pretend... They do whatever it takes to get what they want. It's not a bad thing in that it is their natural way of learning how to interact with other humans around them to survive in their world.

Following traumatic interpersonal experiences of abuse and neglect, however, a child's natural learning process gets put on steroids. Manipulating no longer means getting another ice cream cone; it becomes a matter of life and death. Thus begins the traumatized child's instinctive, reactionary, constant battle for control. This battle often occurs in a family already struggling with intergenerational trauma dynamics of emotional chaos, shifting alliances, and irrational behaviors.

The constant battling for control seen in intergenerational trauma family dynamics can be traumatizing for a child because it lacks the clear guidelines and predictable structure of healthy (enough) family relationships and house rules. The child's constant battle for control is a major contributor to maintaining chronic sympathetic nervous system activation throughout childhood. That chronic anxiety shapes the child's brain. It increases the likelihood that they will use unhealthy self-soothing behaviors (substance abuse, self-harm) and unhealthy interpersonal methods of control (aggression, manipulation) later in life.

What makes any control good or bad? Bad control has 3 main characteristics:

- Bad control is unsustainable
- Bad control offers illusory control
- Bad control is destructive to everyone

Good control also has 3 main characteristics:

- Good control is sustainable
- Good control offers real control
- Good control is constructive to everyone

Positive self-care, healthy exercise & nutrition, collaborative communication, self-soothing, grounding, competent boundary setting, and self-advocacy skills all present examples of good control tactics for the healthy Thriver. While far from easy, the 'simple' concept is as follows: identify your bad control tactics, and then steadily train in good control tactics to replace each bad one!

Rule #7

Remove shame, learn from guilt, show remorse, and build esteem.

Rule summary:

While toxic shame can be a brutal barrier to any Survivor's path to thriving, the emotion of shame itself is natural and good—or at least a functional part of Mother Nature's complex and wondrous systems. Shame is essentially a fear of disconnection from others that encourages pro-social behaviors.

Too much shame can easily become toxic. Once trauma-based shame is removed, Thrivers can understand their trauma history with more objectivity and empathy. These new insights enable them to efficiently learn from their history, apply guilt and personal responsibility where they belong, and carefully select their thriving path in life. Researcher and author Brene Brown describes shame as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.” In summary: “I am sorry for who I am.”

The guilt we are addressing here regarding intergenerational trauma is the emotion one feels after realizing that their behaviors damaged another human being or themselves, as in, “I feel guilty for my behaviors that caused damage.” Guilt is a wonderful compass and intuitive guide... once we distinguish it from shame! Toxic shame drives us to isolate ourselves, whereas guilt can potentially drive us toward one another by reducing our misbehaviors. Guilt's potential is only actualized if you hold yourself accountable for your behaviors (and resulting consequences), even when you are not proud of them.

Remorse refers to a deep and painful regret for wrongdoing: “I am deeply sorrowful that my behaviors have caused you harm. I wish that I could take back my (guilty) behaviors.” As Survivors practice rule #7, they will build esteem in the eyes of others and themselves as their personal accountability leads to greater learning, skills, courage, and wisdom. One must practice showing remorse to live with and maximize learning from guilt.

Personal Declaration

Shame keeps driving me to make excuses, to hide the authentic me, because I cannot tolerate being the unresolvable, unlovable problem. Once I remove shame, then it is simply my behaviors and their natural consequences that remain, without judgment or disgust. Once I can recognize bad consequences, then I can change my behaviors toward better consequences. So you (others and self) can keep your shame, keep your judgments, keep your wagging finger and “should” statements, and fuck off with them. If you intend to help me understand how my behaviors led to bad consequences, then take a seat and help me learn. If appropriate, I will apologize for the negative consequences I have caused. I am no longer sorry for who I am... that is now in my past. As I remove my toxic shame, I am learning to accept and love myself while maintaining personal accountability for my behaviors.

Avoid the six ‘sorry’ mistakes:

1. The hit-and-run apology.
2. “I’m sorry, but...”
3. Falling for “Why did you do it?”
4. The 12-Step excuse.
5. Missing the opportunity to learn from counterpart.
6. Getting stuck in showing remorse.

Rule #8

Practice treating yourself in a self-loving and self-respecting fashion.

Rule summary:

The ability to effectively self-love and self-respect will help Survivors heal from their childhoods in which love and respect were lacking from key individuals—parents, family members, guardians—who were supposed to provide these critical elements of a healthy childhood.

Interpersonal trauma tells a child, “Your safety and happiness do not matter to us adults.” In their struggle to survive these painful experiences, children typically internalize this message, and then repeatedly deprive themselves of love and respect as they align their internal dialogue with their external world. Thus, Survivors become very practiced at disregarding their own well-being during childhood. They believe the subconscious Trauma Lie, “I am not the most important person here, even to me. To survive, I must tend to the most important other in the room.” Self-care—the practice of preserving or improving one’s own health—often remains underdeveloped because of this persistent focus on others.

Because these Survivors have never been taught how to self-love skillfully, they often feel undeserving of loving treatment (from self or others). Their habitually dismissive, unloving, and disrespectful self-treatment makes it difficult for them to recognize when others are doing the same to them. An unfamiliarity with loving and respectful behaviors, together with feelings of unworthiness, lead to the unfortunate tendency for Survivors to pair up with multiple abusers over time. These relationships typically end only after abusive behaviors steadily increase until the Survivor can say, “Even I do not deserve this!”

Techniques for Practicing Self-Love and Self-Respect

- 1. In moments of confusion, ask yourself, “What would a self-loving and self-respecting person do?”** This first trick is oddly effective in its simplicity. Slowing down to answer this question mobilizes deliberate, creative thinking that can illuminate the habitual self-depriving thoughts and behaviors to be replaced by thriving self-treatment.
- 2. Treat yourself as you would have others treat your child (or a niece, nephew, or other child you care about).** When engaging in harsh self-treatment, ask yourself, “How would I want others to treat my child?” If you continue to shame and brutalize yourself, you must accept the image of someone doing the same to your children. Fair is fair. Brutalizing your inner child = brutalizing your offspring.
- 3. Know that children will do as you do, not as you tell them to do.** Parents often insist that their children obey their words instead of following their example: “Never let someone treat you poorly... like I do.” While giving great verbal advice, parents often model harsh self-treatment and self-sacrifice. Unfortunately, no matter what verbal advice they are given, children mimic the (healthy and unhealthy) behaviors they see.

Personal health through nutrition, sleep, and fitness:

A fantastic place to practice treating yourself in a self-loving and self-respecting fashion lies in the realm of personal health. We can take personal responsibility for our own health by developing daily and weekly routines of consuming healthy foods, exercising in ways that strengthen and optimize the body, and getting quality sleep.

The interpersonal realm:

In the interpersonal realm, we can practice treating ourselves in self-loving and self-respecting fashions by practicing positive self-advocacy and boundary setting skills.

Drills & Skills: 3 Verbal Techniques for Self-Advocacy

Technique #1: “That does not work for me.”

The barrage of pleading, threats, ultimatums, insinuations, and other emotional manipulations that go along with a tantrum thrown by someone accustomed to getting what they want can all be met with this same phrase: “That does not work for me.” You can offer brief explanations or thoughts and refer to this statement whenever the exchange becomes overly complex or confusing. The simplicity of this phrase can be soothing for those (like me) who are not ‘quick-witted’ in argumentative exchanges.

Technique #2: “I would like _____ from you.”

Refrain from including “should” statements when asking for behavioral changes, as in, “You should do the dishes because you should want to make me happy.” “Should” statements attempt to outsource the reason for doing the task (under some general philosophical pressure) to avoid the possibility of personal rejection if the answer comes back as “No.” This indirect communication weakens your request. The stronger and more honest approach would be a direct expression of personal desire: “I would like you to do the dishes today, please.” This is also more factual because it delineates the cause-effect relationship of someone’s behaviors causing pleasure for another.

Technique #3: “I am practicing treating myself in a self-loving and self-respecting fashion.”

This transparent and honest statement reminds you during a challenging argument that you are making reasonable and healthy requests. Another benefit is that it is difficult for your counterpart to argue against this statement when behaving in an honestly self-loving and self-respecting fashion. What will they say? “I think you are being selfish by suddenly trying to treat yourself in a self-loving fashion?” Manipulators typically try to shift the focus to their own situation as a distraction from this effective technique.

Rule #9

The pendulum effect is a natural response to trauma.

Rule summary:

Pendulums rhythmically swing back and forth, and take an extraordinarily long time to eventually settle into the bottom of the arc, finally in a state of rest. The trauma-based ‘pendulum effect’ refers to human beings’ tendency to react to stressful experiences with exaggerated, polarized responses as part of a subconscious attempt to minimize the likely recurrence of the experience. Survivors ‘swing’ between the two extremes of intense suppression and explosive overexpression. Our goal here is to acclimate to the healthy, normative middle ground between the two extremes.

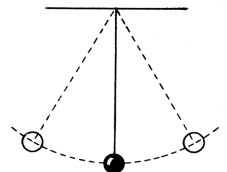
In addition to an individual’s pendulum effect, we can also observe generational pendulum effects. One example would be a male Survivor of childhood sexual abuse who passes his Trauma Lies down to his daughter. His fears of a man hurting his daughter urge him toward intense (overly strict) behavioral boundaries. He does not let her go on sleepovers away from home or engage in friendships with boys because “they only want one thing from you.” The daughter subconsciously infers another Trauma Lie: “Women are predominantly sex objects for men.” The father’s overly strict boundaries deprive her of valuable practice selecting mates and developing healthy intimate relationships in a stable family environment. This father’s insistence on shielding his daughter from any possibility of sexual abuse has rendered her more inexperienced and intrigued by the same ‘bad boys’ that her father warns her about. She eventually seeks the protective, violent men that resemble her protective, living-in-violence-of-mind father. This intergenerational pendulum effect between overly strict and overly permissive parenting presents a brutal cycle that repeats exactly what it seeks to halt!

The Pendulum Effect of evolutionary behaviors:

1. **The sexuality pendulum.** The deep shame and fear experienced with sexual abuse naturally leads to a powerful pendulum effect in which the Survivor will either become hyposexual or hypersexual in response.
2. **The aggression pendulum.** Aggression can also swing between extremes: overt aggression on one end and subjugation of personal will on the other. The healthy middle of the arc instead involves mutual respect and collaboration.
3. **The feeding pendulum.** Because our feeding habits are so deeply connected to our evolutionary survival, our relationship with food is highly subject to hijacking and dysfunction following traumatic childhood experiences. The pendulum effect leads Survivors to either overeat or undereat.

What can we do about this?

We apply the 1-2-3 Breathe-Plan-Do! formula over and over!



Rule #10

Anger begets anger, violence begets violence, and love begets love.

Rule summary:

Each component in this rule is expansive unto infinity. There is no end to the depths of anger, no bottom to the pit of violence, and no limit to the expansion of love.

Most humans prefer the empowering nature of anger over other negative emotions that feel more vulnerable. Additionally, the action-oriented nature of anger is preferred over the paralyzing influence of fear-based emotions. Anger can be beneficial because it offers a more empowered, motivated emotional state than the vulnerable feelings that led to it!

It is helpful to think of anger as an umbrella emotion that 'covers up' the emotions that drive its experience. Under the protective umbrella are typically several vulnerable emotions that people prefer to disregard, such as frustration, resentment, and belittlement. Though anger might feel better than these emotions, rule #10 warns that indulging in anger is not without risk. The more one focuses on anger, the more that anger expands to consume their time, attitudes, behaviors, and goals. This is true for various types of anger. Many experience jealous anger toward those who have more than them. Others experience fear-based anger toward the unknown or justifiable anger toward an abusive predator. Whatever the type, when allowed free rein, anger will rapidly expand into greater anger.

Proactive versus reactive violence:

- **Proactive violence.** Proactive violence (also called instrumental or premeditated violence) refers to violence that seeks to gain some kind of personal reward. Examples of proactive violence include using a weapon to rob someone for money or planning violence to gain a political reward. The thoughtful calculation of such violence occurs predominantly in the Learning Brain.
- **Reactive violence.** Reactive violence (sometimes called impulsive, unpremeditated, or affective violence) is motivated by fear or anger and aims to hurt someone in response to a perceived danger or provocation. reactive violence is reflexively driven by the Primal Brain. This sort of violence comes with significant sympathetic arousal that typically fuels an excessively violent response, especially in the case of prolonged, unresolved relationship issues. A C-PTSD Victim, for instance, might perceive a threat in something their significant other says and then 'defend' themselves by going on a warpath of reactive violence (which may be verbal or physical).

What can we do about this?

Practice collaborative communication, setting healthy boundaries, self-advocacy skills, self-soothing skills, and... actively apply the 1-2-3 Breathe-Plan-Do! formula over and over!

Rule #11

We are responsible for the decisions that we are aware of.

Rule summary:

Thrivers benefit from holding themselves accountable for all the areas of life for which they can assume responsibility, and by acknowledging the areas of life, past and present, that are not their responsibility. This offers benefits of personal empowerment, healthy empathy for the self, and an increase in good control over one's life and relationships. The main goal of rule #11 is to normalize processes of self-education and skill building. This leads to greater personal competencies and (good) control in key areas of life, such as financial stability, family communication, self-defense, and countless others. The more responsibilities you purposefully add to your life, the more competencies and personal empowerment you gain.

Obstacles to thriving personal accountability:

1. **Victimhood!** Anyone can be victimized momentarily, but actively maintaining the role of Victim presents a formidable obstacle to individual and family thriving. "The victim stance is a powerful one. "The victim is always morally right, neither responsible nor accountable, and forever entitled to sympathy" (Ofer Zur, 1995).
2. **"Should" statements.** The main problem with "should" statements is that they are not based on facts. Professional Victims use these statements about how the world "should" run to absolve themselves of responsibilities, labeling other people's misbehaviors as something that "should" not have happened.
3. **Victim blaming diversion.** Victim blaming refers to the act of holding a victim partially or wholly at fault for the harm that befell them. This flawed logic can cause even more harm for Survivors of abuse that was, of course, not their fault. But, for those living in professional Victimhood, harm can also come from weaponizing this concept as a means of avoiding personal accountability in the present.
4. **Dissociation.** Dissociation is a natural response to traumas in which a person experiences mild to severe detachment from their immediate surroundings, physical body, or emotions. Pathological dissociation can present with the sense that the self (depersonalization) or the world (derealization) is unreal. While the other three obstacles are experienced as voluntary, dissociation is typically experienced as involuntary, especially before Survivors learn to effectively shift from sympathetic to parasympathetic mode. As they develop their self-soothing skills, Survivors can recognize dissociative symptoms earlier, reduce or prevent their occurrence, and recover faster when they do occur. "I am responsible for the decisions I am aware of, including my own dissociation!"

“We are not responsible for the decisions we were unaware of.”

It's difficult to have empathy for yourself when recollecting past mistakes or self-blaming for past traumas. Many past regretful actions were committed due to personal ignorance of healthier alternatives. Recognizing the difficulty of your own past ignorance and challenging situations calls forth the nurturing, forgiving, loving, and guiding voice that leads to greater thriving. This corollary develops self-empathy for past mistakes by slowing down to address the complexity and honest challenges of each scenario. C-PTSD involves the (subconscious) self-guided re-experiencing of childhood traumas. Adult Survivors perpetuate the cycles of violence, shame, and neglect of their youth by voluntarily engaging in many unhealthy behaviors! These are natural responses to intergenerational family trauma that maintain trauma cycles that the Survivor is not fully aware of.

Exit the Victim mindset! We can counter the Victim mindset with purposeful thriving messages spoken to the self in the form of mantras. Here are a few examples:

- **Cognitive obstacle:** “So much of my life has been wasted in Victimhood and survival mode. It is too late for me.” **Thriving mantra:** “So much of my life lost to trauma presents a genuine and valid sadness that I actively acknowledge and grieve. It is exactly for this reason that I will not spend any more time living in my loss when I can thrive forward in love, hope, diligence, and community.”
- **Cognitive obstacle:** “I did not do anything wrong, mean, violent... Therefore, it is not my responsibility to...” **Thriving mantra:** “I was not aggressive toward others, but I was also not capable of preventing aggression from happening to me (and my family). I now commit myself to the task of becoming so educated and skilled in my thriving that I can prevent such future aggression. I commit to becoming more powerful than any abuser by living my life in love, discipline, and community.”

Normalizing the rule, “We are responsible for the decisions that we are aware of,” leads to a lifelong process of acquiring more personal responsibilities and competencies through focused self-education, skills building, and evolving attitudes. Differentiating between empathy and excuses, as well as between blame and responsibility, is critical for healing. With practice, Survivors can develop empathy for the uneducated self of yesterday while taking personal responsibility for their current and future behaviors.

Rule #12

It's us against trauma world.

Rule summary:

The best mindset for healing and thriving will be achieved by integrating rule #12 into the Thriver's worldview in which they consider every other human being on Earth a fellow member of mankind struggling with their own traumas, in various stages of healing.

An everlasting relationship is created the moment that interpersonal violence occurs between two human beings. Each becomes inextricably tied to the other in a complex relationship that both people would often prefer to abolish. Unfortunately, 'no relationship' is not an option, since human beings have not figured out how to eliminate traumatic memories. So it becomes important for Survivors to decide on the type of relationship they maintain with the culprits of their traumatizing childhood experiences.

Will the relationship remain forever combative, with 'winners' and 'losers', filled with anger and hatred? Will it remain embedded in anxiety-ridden memories? Without intentional guidance, lifelong disharmony naturally persists. Fortunately, Survivors can push these relationships to evolve and mature to the point of greater internal peace and interpersonal harmony, freeing them of intensely loathsome relationships of their past.

Thriving in trauma world relationships:

Practice empathy! It can be difficult for a Survivor to see past their own fear-driven, survivalist, egocentric viewpoint and observe the big picture. But when they do, they can see how the sicknesses, dysfunctions, and traumatic experiences of unhealthy family members impaired those family members' efforts to engage in loving connectivity with the young Survivor. Let us be realistic about the monumental task of absorbing this rule into the mindset of someone raised in stress, trauma, violence, and neglect: it is not simple or easy. The great work of this challenge, however, will bring great reward.

Intergenerational insights: The family tree project.

Creating an extensive family tree offers Survivors profound insights into personal issues within the context of their family's big picture. Many seemingly 'self-inflicted' problems were actually handed down to the Survivor, which becomes readily apparent through this project. Survivors are encouraged to treat this project as an ongoing labor of love that can serve as an amazing tool for offering guidance to the next generation of the family.

In addition to basic demographic information, write a brief bio for each member of the family. This can include work history, place of birth, and major life events. Add trauma-specific notes for each person on the family tree. This project will likely take on increasing meaning over time as Survivors gain awareness of their family's historical struggles and integrate these 20 rules into their personal understanding of their family's trauma history.

Rule #13

Secrets destroy!

Rule summary:

There are many reasons individuals keep secrets about their traumatic childhoods. Family and societal pressures urge the Survivor not to talk about shame-based family experiences, and instead to “leave the past in the past and get over it.”

Many intelligent reasons exist to keep traumas secret, like avoiding the unwanted scrutiny of the public eye or legal or financial consequences in some cases. That said, as soon as a Survivor keeps their experience a secret, they start down a path of seclusion from other human beings who might have offered healthy corrective feedback. While this feels safer in the moment, it leaves the Survivor susceptible to cognitive distortions, toxic shame, and increasing disconnection from others over time.

Secrets =

- Isolation from others,
- Isolation from feedback that counters Trauma Lies,
- Increasingly distorted thinking,
- Perpetual state of toxic shame,
- Lack of emotional support from loving others,
- Lack of material resources, and
- Unhealthy/Sick alliances within the family.

When keeping abuse a secret, there also develops a sense of entanglement between Victim and abuser because they are the only two humans who know what happened. The rest of the world becomes viewed as gullible, naïve, and unknowing, while the abuser and Victim live in their ‘real’ world. Sharing toxic, trauma-based secrets with a third person drastically changes the dynamics of the abuser-Victim alliance. The abuser immediately loses the powerful control afforded by exclusive ownership of the Victim’s shameful secret.

To confront or not to confront an abuser...

Many Survivors struggle with how far to go with unloading their family’s toxic secrets. An amateur mistake for Survivors and therapists alike is believing that every Survivor will be best served by directly confronting their past abuser. While this can be beneficial, it is not always the case. Healing from trauma can take many forms, and it is up to each Survivor to decide which path is healthiest for their situation.

Start unloading... carefully!

When choosing to divulge personal and family secrets, consider the variables of confidentiality, stability, capacity for positive support, and educational background of each recipient of your secrets. Various options can include trauma-informed therapists or life coaches, clergy, confidants and friends, and group therapies.

Rule #14

Boundaries are confusing, so keep practicing better boundaries.

Rule summary:

When a family follows healthy, structured boundaries, the children in the household feel generally safe as they develop a solid understanding of how to behave to maintain harmony and positive relationships. Most families of intergenerational trauma struggle tremendously with unstructured, random, reactive, and manipulative boundaries, such that children do not feel safe and do not develop a consistent understanding of how best to behave for success in life and relationships. Notice this rule does not stipulate that you “use” better boundaries but that you “keep practicing.” This is intentional since Survivors cannot be expected to have an intuitive understanding of what makes boundaries healthy or unhealthy. It is more realistic to simply “practice” doing better than last week as you steadily move toward stable, thriving boundaries.

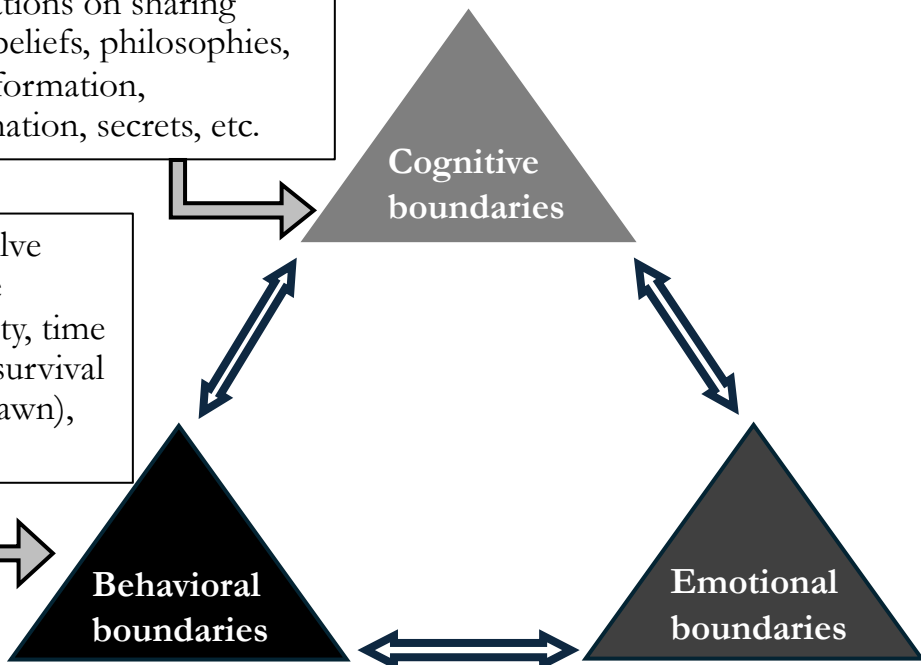
Three self-advocacy techniques to practice getting started:

- “That does not work for me.”
- “This is what I would like...”
- “Let us figure out our best (or most fair) compromise.”

Cognitive boundaries = limitations on sharing information, such as thoughts, beliefs, philosophies, personal memories, personal information, knowledge, work-related information, secrets, etc.

Behavioral boundaries = involve things in the physical world, like money, the human body, property, time spent together, personal space, survival responses (fight, flight, freeze, fawn), rewards and punishments, etc.

Emotional boundaries = the degree to which one allows themselves to feel their emotions (versus suppress them) personally, as well as show or express their emotions to others.



Rule #15

Center of the Universe is not a compliment!

Rule summary:

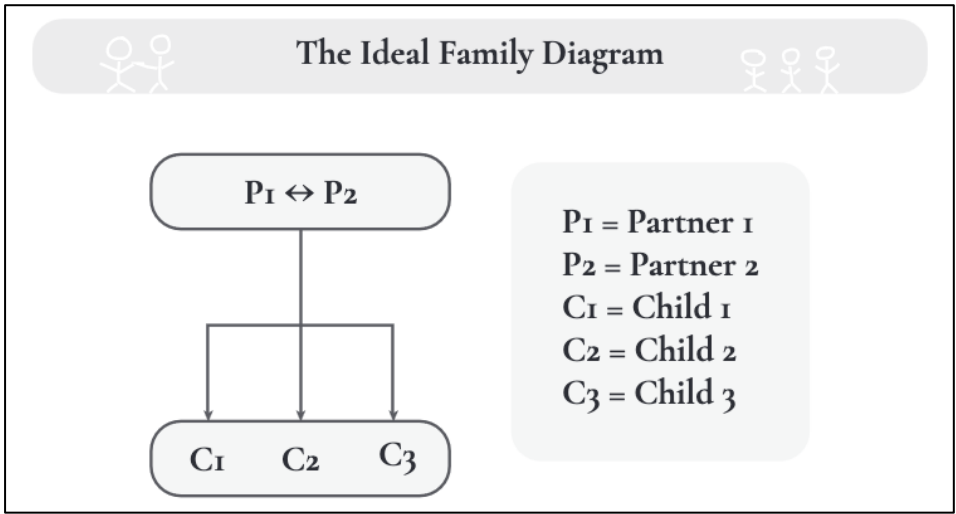
The Center of the Universe refers to intergenerational trauma dynamics in which family members (individual planets) ‘orbit’ around the family member (the Center) who is the most effective at using bad control mechanisms—manipulation, financial domination, aggression, sexuality, Victimhood, intellectualism—to maintain dysfunctional control of the family environment (the universe). In this model, everyone lives reactively to the environment. This is typically experienced as chaotic by the family members, who remain in chronic survival mode, acting out their Trauma Lies about how to survive the chaos.

While experienced as chaotic, this system is actually very stable in that the Center of the Universe does whatever it takes to remain the Center, even to the death. Family members (planets in orbit) are also stable in the fear and Trauma Lies that keep them securely reacting to the chaotic dynamics while figuring out how to gain favor, affection, or alliances. Everyone is doing everything they believe they need to do to survive, each using manipulations, aggression, withholding, or compliance to get a little of what they want. This fosters bitter, manipulative competition between participants instead of collaboration and disciplined adherence to healthy rules and roles.

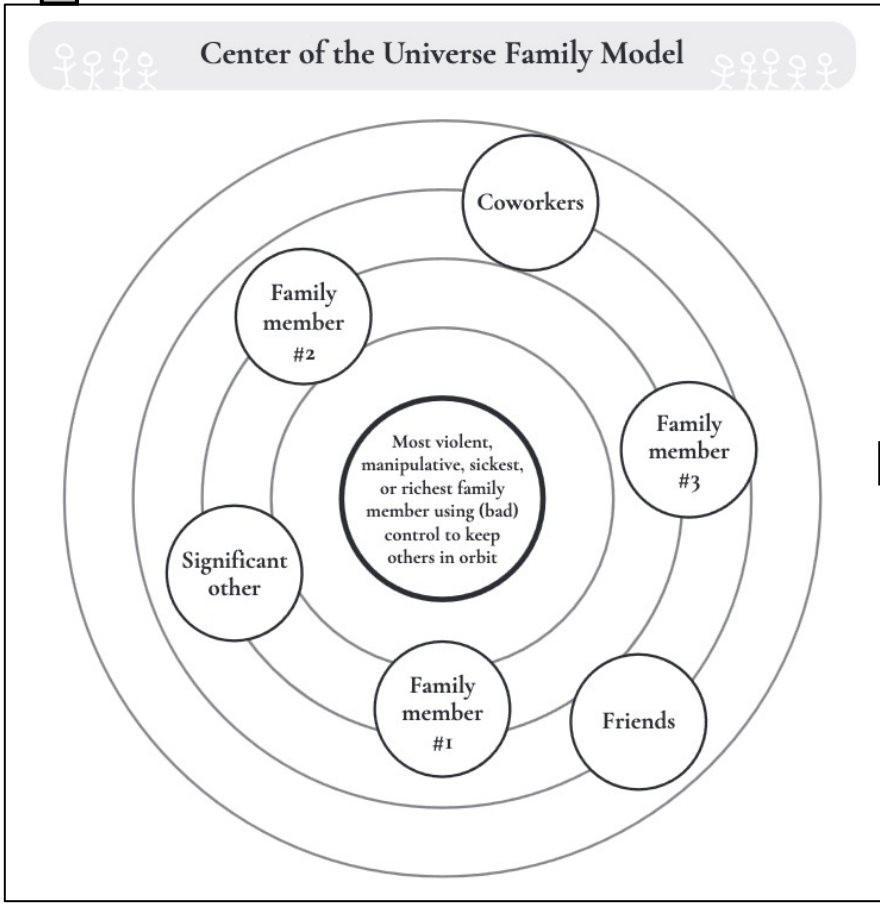
There are two main goals to be achieved by learning about the Center of the Universe model. First, identifying these awful dynamics will make it more realistic and efficient to transition toward more harmonious family dynamics, like the Ideal Family Structure. The second goal of this rule is to practice applying good control strategies while also identifying other family members’ specific bad control methods.

The Ideal Family Structure is a model for family dynamics. In it, two partners (spouses, parents, significant others) function as an impenetrable team that collaborates in a mutually supportive and respectful fashion to create the house rules and regulations that are (roughly) equally applied to the children. Each individual does their best to fulfill their specific role. The partners commit to the role of ‘best partner’ by maintaining the other as their primary focus, and they both act collaboratively in the best interests of their children. The children toil healthily to excel according to the consistent rules outlined by the parental team, including a stable system of rewards and punishments. This structured organization feels safe to children and parents because all are following a fixed set of healthy rules and structures instead of obeying an individual’s beliefs and whims.

Despite various objections to the Ideal Family Structure, this approach to family dynamics has consistently proven to be the most robust, stable, productive, and conducive to thriving. When the Ideal Structure is impossible, families can strive to live according to the goals, roles, and spirit of the model.



Intergenerational upward mobility:
 Elevate your family's thriving potential by transitioning from the toxic Center of the Universe model to the Ideal Family model that offers a stable structure with healthy roles for each member to collaboratively live by.



Rule #16

Overindulgent dynamics are bad.. period.

Rule summary:

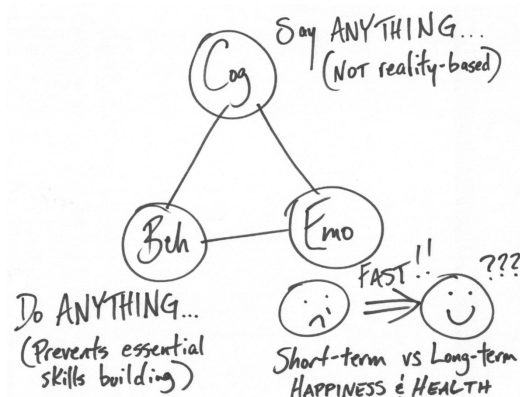
Overindulgent dynamics refers to relationship dynamics in which momentary soothing is prioritized over long-term happiness and health. In these relationships, at least one individual habitually responds to the perceived suffering of another by saying or doing anything to make them feel better.

The destructive components of overindulgent dynamics begin in the emotional realm where overindulgers fail to recognize the differences between short-term emotional appeasement and long-term happiness and competency. After seeing their loved one suffer, the overindulger experiences so much personal distress that they feel they must leap into action and do whatever it takes to put a smile on the face of their loved one. This emotional impatience leads to a blinding focus on the immediate relief of unpleasant emotions for both the overindulged and the overindulger.

The alternative to this short-sighted impatience is to focus on the loved one's long-term health and happiness. Some suffering is healthy, even necessary, for humans to learn how to best navigate the world. A child who burns their finger on a match learns that fire can be dangerous—an important lesson! Short-term, reasonable suffering is often good for us, especially when developmentally appropriate and building thriving skills and wisdom.

In the cognitive realm, problems arise when the overindulger lacks the education or awareness to offer healthy support to their loved one. Loving intentions can easily lead to destructive results as the overindulger typically lacks insight into their desperate drive to instantly make everything okay by fixing the 'problem' for their loved one. When there is no immediate fix, the overindulger will say anything to make things at least seem okay. Things become unhealthy in this cognitive realm when reality is considered less important than 'fixing' emotional discomfort.

In the cognitive realm, we focus on self-education about topics necessary for optimal thriving. This includes nutrition, finances, fitness, communication, and self-care. Each requires that the Survivor slow down to take personal accountability for learning what is required to thrive. In this way, they can offer healthier support to their loved ones instead of simply trying to remove their suffering in the short term.



In the behavioral realm, the overindulger does anything to make their loved one smile—or at least reduce their immediate suffering. The overindulger who ‘loves’ others in this fashion removes the natural consequences of the overindulged’s misbehaviors and shields them from personal responsibilities. Many problems emerge for the overindulged when they must function in ‘the real world’ without the overindulgent protection, such as:

- **Lack of thriving skills development** – Because the overindulger solves problems for their loved one, the overindulged fails to learn skills critical for success in life.
- **Overdependency** – Absent thriving skills for self-reliance, the overindulged remains dependent on the overindulger to make it through life.
- **Self-esteem issues** – The overindulged typically develops unrealistically inflated self-esteem because of the exaggerated, unfounded positive statements about them.
- **Selfishness** – Overindulgent parenting leads to a persistent pattern of selfishness and entitlement in key adult relationships because they were taught, “It is all about me.” They typically pair up with self-sacrificing overindulgents in their adult relationships.

Healthy parenting styles: The formula for Mentor (Behavioral) Parenting

Behavioral parenting focuses heavily on applying rewards and punishments as consequences right after target behaviors that parents wish to increase or decrease in frequency. Mentor parenting includes discussions that take place after the consequences have been worked out. These discussions help children feel secure while building strong, competent, healthy adults.

Behavioral/Mentor Parenting	Overindulgent Parenting
<p style="text-align: center;">$B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$</p> <p style="text-align: center;">$B^T \rightarrow C^{+/-} \rightarrow D^{LL}$</p> <p>B = Behavior</p> <p>C = Consequence</p> <p>D = Discussion</p> <p>B^T = Target behavior. The superscript "T" reminds us to isolate one behavior to focus on increasing or decreasing its frequency.</p> <p>$C^{+/-}$ = Consequence. The superscript of (+) or (-) reminds us to clarify whether a favorable or unfavorable consequence is being implemented.</p> <p>D^{LL} = Life lesson. The superscript "LL" refers to the discussion that explains to child the reasons for rewards or punishments relative to the Target Behavior. "To thrive as an adult, we must..."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">$B \rightarrow D \rightarrow C$</p> <p style="text-align: center;">$B^T \rightarrow D^{Neg} \rightarrow C^?$</p> <p>B = Behavior</p> <p>D = Discussion</p> <p>C = Consequence</p> <p>B^T = Target behavior.</p> <p>D^{Neg} = "Neg" denotes "Negotiation." When the discussion comes before the consequence, it devolves into a negotiation that encourages a child to learn manipulative tactics to avoid potential consequences.</p> <p>$C^?$ = Potential Consequence. The consequence has become questionable, depending on child's ability to negotiate and manipulate. It also depends on parent's tolerance for the child's (real or feigned) negative emotional experience.</p>

Rule #17

Addictions = Intimacy Disorders.

Rule summary:

The interplay between addiction and intergenerational trauma is extensive, complex, and very difficult to treat. Where there is dysfunction and emotional pain, addictions often follow. They enter the picture as Survivors attempt to find solace from their suffering, and the forms they can take are endless—shopping, religion, substance abuse, and workaholism are just a few. There are three essential trauma world addiction truths that will be key to understanding this rule:

- For Survivors, substances offer welcome relief from chronic anxiety symptoms.
- Substance abuse leads to poor decisions and behaviors that damage self and others.
- After perpetrating interpersonal violence against others, substances offer temporary relief from guilt, toxic shame, and existential suffering.

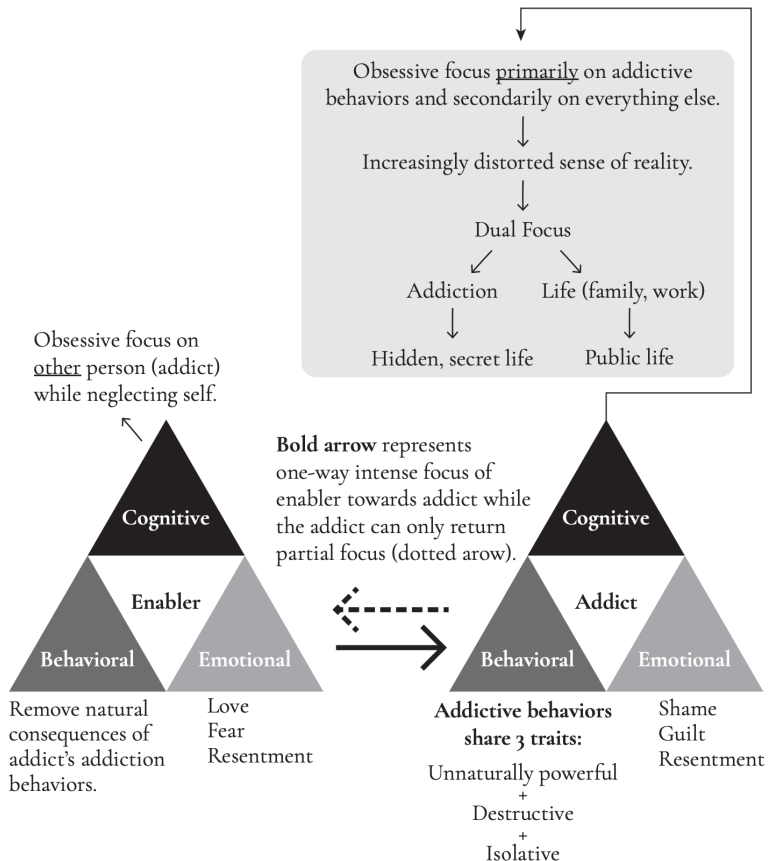
As the Survivor's addictive involvement becomes their **primary focus**, the rest of their life becomes **secondary**, and this distinction only intensifies over time. As the brain-hijacking process builds, brain functioning declines, thus deteriorating the Survivor's capabilities for their secondary focus on family, friends, and work.

Simplified (but far from easy) game plan:

1. Cease addictive behaviors
2. Prioritize interpersonal engagement
3. Address cognitive distortions and distorted reality

This third step starts with studying the **list of cognitive distortions** included toward the end of this document.

Addictions = Intimacy Disorders



Rule #18

Will versus skill... *both* are necessary.

Rule summary:

Usually, skill beats will... especially over time. Will alone is simply not enough for consistent victories or success in business and relationships. Will and skill are forever intertwined. Will is required to acquire skills, and skills must be willingly utilized to be of any value. When developing thriving capabilities, increases in skills lead to increases in motivation (will) and increases in motivation lead to increases in skills.

Intense childhood experiences of trauma can rip away a child's sense of power over the world. Their learned helplessness from Trauma Lies like, "I am powerless," leads to will-crushing **self-fulfilling prophecies** in which low expectations of success lead to inadequate efforts that fail. Luckily, positive self-fulfilling prophecies exist in which confidence in your abilities leads to expectations of success, better task performances, and ultimately success itself. Each success enhances motivation to learn more skills, which then increases the efficiency of learning that next critical skill set. Success is addictive... in a good way!

Necessary skills

The most efficient path toward thriving starts with a solid foundation of **self-soothing skills**, including controlled breathing, muscle relaxation, and mindfulness. This skill set is key because maintaining parasympathetic mode accelerates all future learning and makes each skill more effective in practice.

While developing self-soothing skills, we add more complex interpersonal skills necessary for thriving, like communication, boundary-setting, self-advocacy, thought correction, and many more. Advanced **collaborative communication** is perhaps the most critical skill set for cultivating thriving relationships and healing from family trauma.

Increase will through visualization and social motivation

How do you create more will—or motivation—to apply yourself to therapy when the motivation is not naturally there? Rule #1 introduced the strategy of using vivid pictures of success to foster a greater will to achieve that success. Writing motivational guidelines on your bathroom mirror fosters motivation each time you brush your teeth. Accountability partners help cheerlead and build excitement about weekly progress toward thriving goals.

Selecting skilled partners, friends, and support up the scale

A good motto to remember is "Move up the scale, pick up the scale" (see thriving scale on next page). As Survivors develop the capacity to maintain stable, fully engaged relationships, they will increasingly benefit from selecting others who are equal to or higher than them on the thriving scale. Humans are heavily influenced by the people around them, and it is better to be influenced by expert Thrivers who have both the will and skills to live boldly in love and engagement instead of anger and isolation.

The Toxicity Scale: From Toxic to Thriving

Thriving characteristics: Individual

Emotional

Expert self-soother: Practiced control of autonomic nervous system = consistent parasympathetic mode.

- ✓ Solid emotion regulation
- ✓ Delayed gratification intact
- ✓ Emotionally secure and independent
- ✓ Rapid recovery when triggered by trauma cues
- ✓ Eliminates toxic shame from trauma memories & daily life

Cognitive

Cognitive restructuring expert: High on introspection, self-monitoring, and proactive goal-orientation.

- ✓ Persistently self-educating
- ✓ Positive self-talk controls Inner Critic
- ✓ Monitors personal style of distorted thinking
- ✓ Consistently replaces personal Trauma Lies with Life Truths
- ✓ Aware of how emotional triggers and reactivity impact others
- ✓ Highly adaptable and consistently challenges personal beliefs

Behavioral

Stable, consistent behaviors:

- ✓ Active use of 'good control' mechanisms
- ✓ Purposeful, mindful, goal-oriented behaviors
- ✓ Significant self-destructive behaviors eliminated
- ✓ Stable control of addictive behaviors or tendencies
- ✓ Highly productive across realms (family, finances, career, etc.)

Toxic characteristics: Individual

Emotional

Poor self-regulator: Chronic sympathetic (survival) mode = high anxiety, fear, anger, and other intense emotions.

- ✓ Highly guarded/defensive
- ✓ High on toxic shame with low insight
- ✓ Low ability to emotionally empathize with others
- ✓ Easily triggered to intense emotions (rapid mood swings)
- ✓ Impaired delayed gratification (requires immediate soothing from self, others, substances, or material goods)
- ✓ Emotionally dependent on others (Centers need orbiters; Orbiters need Centers)

Cognitive

Poor insight into personal issues:

- ✓ Heavy, unchecked cognitive distortions
- ✓ "Me against the world/others" framework
- ✓ Trauma Lies relatively obvious to all but self
- ✓ Persistent self-loathing (or grandiose narcissism)
- ✓ Delusional, paranoid, depressed, or victimized worldview
- ✓ Poor ability to adapt, challenge personal beliefs, or learn from others' viewpoints

Behavioral

Unstable, volatile, reactive behaviors. Self-destructive behaviors often present.

- ✓ Active addictions often present
- ✓ Abnormal, "threw off" behaviors
- ✓ Disordered or unhealthy eating habits
- ✓ Suicidal thoughts, attempts, or gestures common
- ✓ Self-harm for emotion regulation (cutting, burning, etc.)
- ✓ Unproductive...or obsessively productive at others' expense

Thriving

Toxic

Thriving characteristics: Interpersonal

Emotional

Balances independence with interdependence:

- ✓ Daily lifestyle of "Love begets love"
- ✓ Difficult to rattle (self-control amidst conflict)
- ✓ Normalizes *vulnerability* in safe intimate relationships
- ✓ Empathizes with others while maintaining boundaries
- ✓ Communicates emotional difficulties to supportive others while maintaining personal accountability

Cognitive

Us against Trauma World mindset = mutually beneficial (win-win) relationship goals:

- ✓ Confident self-valuation in relation to others
- ✓ Active, skilled self-advocacy towards fairness
- ✓ Comprehends & learns from others' viewpoints

Behavioral

Expert communication and collaboration (teamwork) skills:

- ✓ Good control tactics towards others
- ✓ Reliably delivers effective support and follow-through
- ✓ Addresses conflict with solution-focused collaboration
- ✓ Works well with others in personal and business relationships
- ✓ Proactive, competent boundary setter: Firm with toxic others versus lesser boundaries for deep engagement with safe others
- ✓ Capable of independent functioning, but chooses extensive, positive interdependence with select others

Toxic characteristics: Interpersonal

Emotional

Volatile, chaotic emotional interplay with others.

- ✓ Defensive and quick to reactive aggression
- ✓ Minimal vulnerability in intimate relationships
- ✓ Weaponized emotions (passive-aggression, anger, shame) used to control others

Cognitive

Entrenched victimhood role = combative interpersonal mindset and reactive thinking:

- ✓ Egocentric and (accidentally) self-focused
- ✓ Unchecked Trauma Lies & cognitive distortions
- ✓ Bad control manipulations: blame game, victim role
- ✓ Zero-sum mentality (fighting for perceived limited resources)
- ✓ Predatory thinking due to Trauma Lies of 'dog eat dog' world
- ✓ Win-or-lose (oppressor-victim) perception of relationships
- ✓ Other-focused enabling removes natural consequences of counterpart's poor behaviors
- ✓ Self-sacrificing while accumulating resentment due to self-inflicted subjugation

Behavioral

Poor communication and collaboration (teamwork) skills:

- ✓ Unreliably delivers support and follow-through
- ✓ Frequent arguments without personal accountability
- ✓ Does not work well with others (unless people-pleasing)
- ✓ Dependent on others to protect or fix self and bad situations
- ✓ Poor conflict resolution = unresolved conflicts accumulate
- ✓ Bad control tactics towards others (physical, sexual, verbal aggression; financial domination; sabotage; self-harm as bait)
- ✓ *Effectively* unsupportive of loved ones due to impoverished personal and interpersonal skillsets

Rule #19

It's not a contest. Trauma is just bad.. and sad.

Rule summary:

The competitive comparison of traumas is a fruitless and potentially damaging waste of time. Traumas of all flavors are just bad... and sad. When trauma occurs, it is far more constructive to simply start addressing it instead of trying to judge whether it is atrocious enough to justify attention. Adult intergenerational trauma Survivors typically select partners from similar family environments, likely because the dysfunctional dynamics seem normal to both individuals. At some point, these partners begin comparing their trauma histories, and often they mistakenly conceptualize their histories in competitive ways.

Rule #19 is important, for example, when considering the damaging effects of childhood physical abuse versus neglect. Survivors who suffered from neglect often have little insight into the severely damaging effects of their experience, so they discount their own struggles in comparison with someone who was “actually abused.” This self-invalidating evaluation shuts down or prevents therapeutic discussions that could help in personal education and healing.

“Trauma is just bad...”

While people admirably use intelligence and optimism to gain wisdom—even inspiration—from their traumatic experiences, this is the equivalent of ‘turning lemons into lemonade’. The best anyone can do is make the most of a terrible situation. Abuse, neglect, and violence destroy the body and mind... they are simply bad. You can live past it, transforming yourself into a wiser, thriving human being, but those things were not good for you!

Rule Corollary: “Trauma therapy is also not a contest.”

It is impossible for any two people to learn the same materials at the same pace, and therefore it is ludicrous to perceive therapy as a contest! Competition between partners will only slow their individual and collective progress down. Each moves at a different pace as they struggle with insights, concepts, and weaknesses while confronting rough challenges in therapy. Here are a few key things to remember:

- Some partners acquire certain skills or educational components faster than others.
- Breaks, lulls, or slowing down will look different for each individual.
- Gaining insight into the peculiar details of an individual family’s trauma history is best done with collaboration, frequent breaks, and education... not with a competitive pace or pressure.



Rule #20

Make it normal.

Rule summary:

Some things will start to feel remarkably normal to you in a short period. Some things, in all honesty, will never feel normal. But even for the things that will never feel normal, you will normalize the discipline necessary to manage them. Behaviors practiced every day look and feel more normal and more natural to your children (or the next generation). This gives us the best chance of reducing the transference of trauma to the next generation.

How long does it take to change a habit?

Popular hypotheses suggest that changing a habit takes 21, 28, 66, or up to 254 days. In reality, the timeline depends on many factors.

- **Motivation** – How badly do you want it? What motivates you?
- **Anatomical adaptation** – Our muscular, hormonal, and neural networks take different amounts of time to adapt to the demands of specific habits.
- **Permanence** – Many people form new habits temporarily (exercise, diets, quit smoking), but creating a permanent new habit is a very different thing!
- **Complexity** – Changing from brushing your teeth with your right hand to brushing with your left is quite a different challenge than quitting daily binge drinking!

Dealing with others' resistance to your new normal

Please be ready to meet resistance from others around you—even loving family members—who will struggle with many of the significant changes you will make within a few years of focused therapy. Some engaging responses can include:





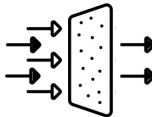

- “This is the new me—I’m also trying to get used to it! I would love it if you could keep an open mind about me making some healthy changes for myself.”
- “I would love the opportunity to discuss your thoughts on all this in greater depth. When can we meet to talk more privately about such things?”

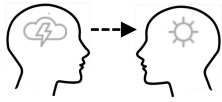
There are two main strategies covered in this book that you can use to maximize your learning potential and speed up your progress as much as reasonably possible.

Tip #1 - Keep slowing down to speed up. This strategy involves optimizing your thinking to be more focused, creative, purposeful, big-picture, and long-term. Improved blood flow to your Learning Brain (via controlled breathing) facilitates deeper focus and patience, helping you efficiently learn the details of each new technical skill.

Tip #2 - Keep picturing the new you. Mindfully maintaining vivid images of your ongoing goals presents a distinct finish line to guide and motivate your behaviors. These pictures of success will evolve over time, which is great. Having a distinct image of your goal to focus on is better than not having one, even if you keep moving the finish line!

Cognitive Distortions by Category

 <p>Magnification (Catastrophizing) Blowing things out of proportion.</p>	<p>Fix: Suggest to self the opposite, and then find the most accurate middle ground.</p>	 <p>Minimization Inappropriately diminishing the importance of something.</p>	Exaggeration
<p>Suggesting that something occurs 100% of the time instead of the more accurate lesser percentage.</p> <p>“You never help me.” “Nothing good ever happens.”</p> <p>Fix: Measure (or estimate) the precise percentage of occurrences.</p>			
 <p>Overgeneralization</p>	<p>Forcing complex concepts into binary (simplistic) categories.</p> <p>“If it’s not perfect, then I have failed.” “There is only right and wrong here.”</p> <p>Fix: Answer the question “What is the gray area that I am missing out on here?”</p>		Active vs Passive Filtering
 <p>All-or-Nothing (Black-and-White) Thinking</p>	<p>Passively taking in only certain evidence (often negative) that supports pre-existing or underlying beliefs.</p> <p>“I just keep failing.” “All I see are terrible people out there.”</p> <p>Fix: Answer the question “What parts of the big picture am I missing here?”</p>		
 <p>Mental Filter</p>	<p>Actively destroying or discounting the positive aspects of a situation or concept.</p> <p>“That doesn’t count.” “She is just saying that to be nice.”</p> <p>Fix: Accept the existence of goodness in the world!</p>		
 <p>Disqualifying the Positive</p>			



Mind Reading

Imagining that we know what others are thinking (typically negative).

“I know what you *really* think...”

Fix: Ask the person, and then consider the possibility they are being honest.

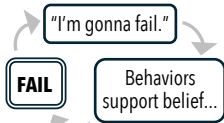


Fortune Telling

Predicting the (typically negative) future.

“I will be stuck in this forever.”

Fix: Wait and see... or work to change the outcome.



Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

When expectations (fortune telling) of a negative outcome lead to behaviors that make it come true.

“I’m gonna fail this test.” Barely study. Fail the test.
“You’re gonna leave me, like the others did.” Fail to collaborate and modify personal behaviors. They leave.

Fix: Recognize personal agency to affect the outcome.



Emotional Reasoning

Emotions can be misleading, typically due to other thought distortions causing the emotion.

“I feel guilty, so I must have done something bad.”

Fix: “My emotions may be lying to me right now.”
Search for other distorted thinking.



“Should” Statements

Opinions, judgments, or beliefs (not facts) that use words like “should,” “need to,” or “must” to suggest that we are doing something wrong. “Should” statements applied to other people often lead to frustration or resentment.

“I really should be studying right now.”

Fix #1: Replace “I should ___” with, “I want to ___.”

Fix #2: Create more factual cause-and-effect statements with “If ___, then ___” statements.



Labeling

Assigning (negative) labels to ourselves, other people, or specific behaviors, which reduces deeper thinking.

“I am useless.” “He is a jerk.” “That is evil.”

Fix: Only positive labels are acceptable. Translate negative labels into more accurate descriptions of emotions and behaviors. “I feel useless because ___.”



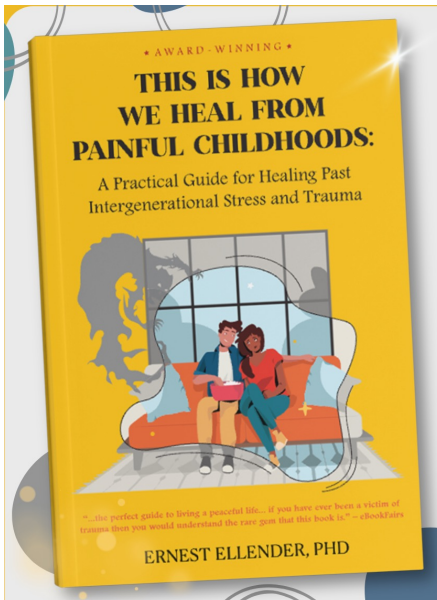
Blame Game (Personalization)

Blaming yourself or others for a negative situation. Pointing fingers (blaming) is past-oriented, punitive, and unnecessarily emotionally distressing.

Fix: Remove “fault” and “blame” from vocabulary. Replace with “responsibility” (future-oriented and emotionally motivating). “I am responsible for ___, and you are responsible for ___.”

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Ernest Ellender, PhD

Life Coach

To contact Ernest about virtual life coaching
or consulting services:

Email: eellender@gmail.com

Phone: 985-381-7848

Websites:

www.healfromchildhood.com

www.ernestellenderphd.com

