

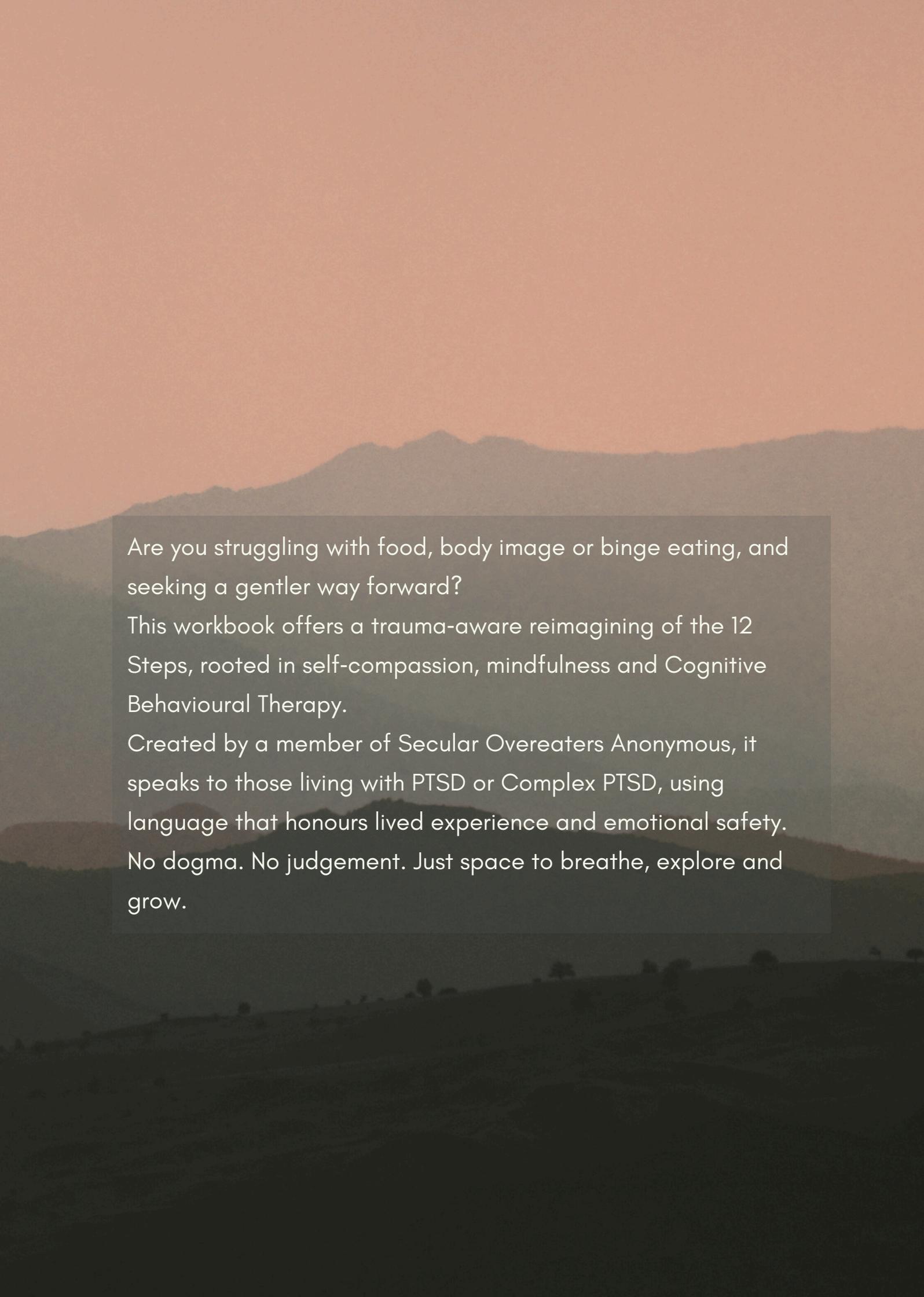


12 STEPS SELF-LOVE WORKBOOK

*A secular and trauma-aware guide to
recovery through reflection and compassion*

by M.

Member of Secular Overeaters



Are you struggling with food, body image or binge eating, and seeking a gentler way forward?

This workbook offers a trauma-aware reimagining of the 12 Steps, rooted in self-compassion, mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Created by a member of Secular Overeaters Anonymous, it speaks to those living with PTSD or Complex PTSD, using language that honours lived experience and emotional safety. No dogma. No judgement. Just space to breathe, explore and grow.



Recognize Patterns with Kindness

STEP I

I notice how particular foods and habits prompt automatic, self-defeating eating patterns, without harsh judgment

I observe how specific foods and habits trigger automatic, self-defeating eating patterns without harsh judgment.

1. When did I feel the urge to eat for comfort?

2. What thoughts, emotions, or bodily sensations accompanied it?



3. In which situations, time, place, emotional state, did this occur?



4. How might this pattern have impacted my energy, mood, or sense of self?



5. What compassionate phrase can I offer myself in those moments?





Accept Support as Self-Respect

STEP 2

I accept that genuine change is sustained by connection, with professionals, peers and self-care, not by self-discipline alone

1. What compassionate phrase can I offer myself in those moments?

2. What was my emotional experience in seeking help, safe, embarrassed, relieved?

3. When I didn't reach out, what stopped me?



4. How does reaching out honour my self-worth?



5. What support will I plan to access next week?





Commit to Value-Driven Actions

STEP 3

I commit to recovery actions that align with my values and reflect self-care and autonomy

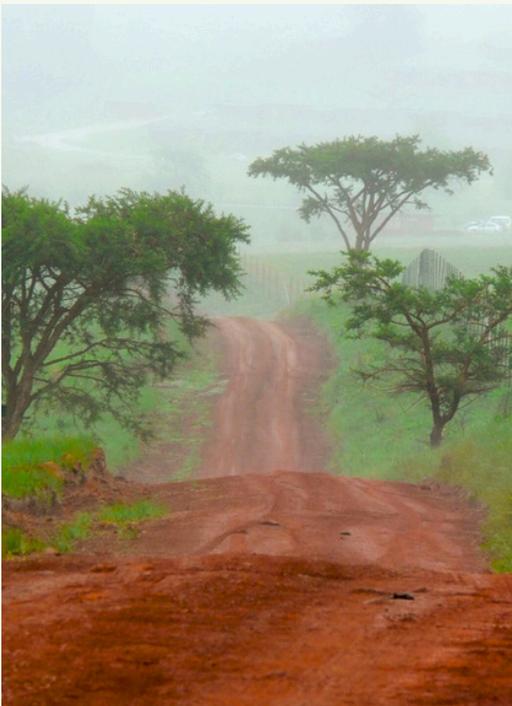
1. Which evidence-based practice did I focus on?

2. How do these actions honour my values of health, safety and self-respect?

3. Which action made me feel most connected to my healing journey?

4. What obstacles arose, and how can I adapt next week?

5. Rate your commitment (1–10).
What would raise it further?



Explore Inner Landscape with Compassion

STEP 4

I explore challenging thoughts, feelings, and impulses without criticism, observing them with empathy

1. What distressing thought, feeling, or pattern surfaced this week?



2. What origins, childhood, trauma, expectations, might underlie it?



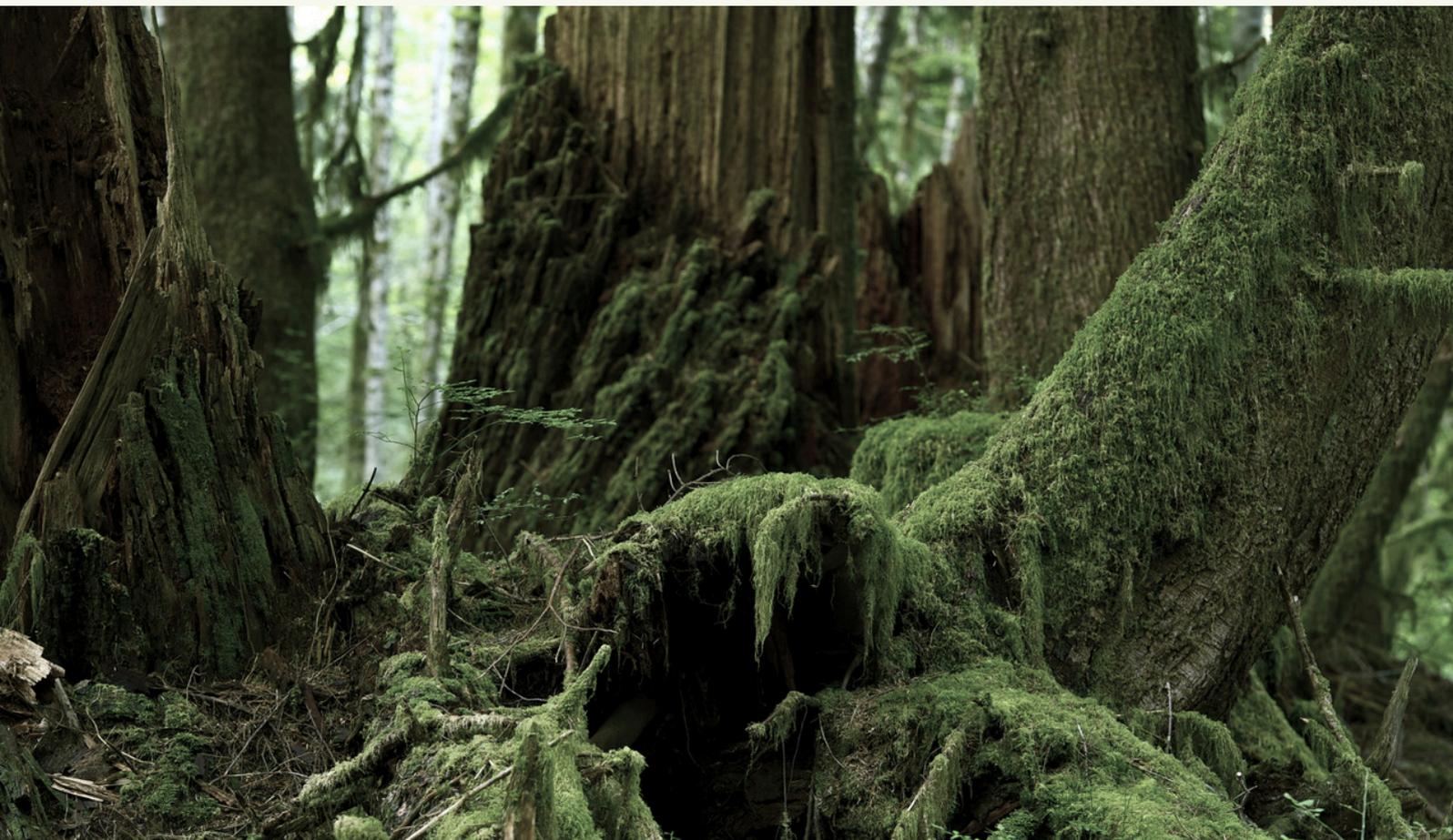
3. What physical sensations did I experience?



4. How did I respond, supportively or harshly?



5. What kind of supportive statement can I offer myself next time?



Share to Heal
STEP 5

I express my authentic feelings to someone I trust,
without filtering, for relief and validation

1. What did I choose to share this week?



2. Who received it, and how did their response support me?



3. What emotions came up before, during, and after sharing?



4. Was there anything I held back? Why?



5. What can help me feel safer when sharing next time?



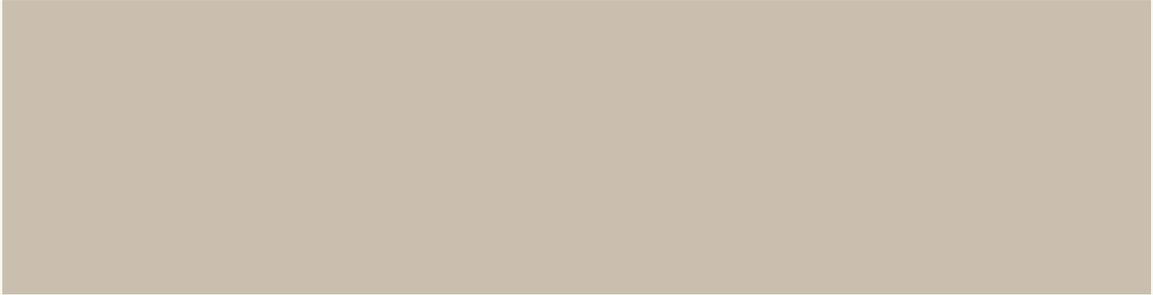
STEP 6 – IDENTIFY & GENTLY RELEASE OLD BELIEFS

I recognise beliefs or behaviours that no longer serve me and open up to more nurturing alternatives.

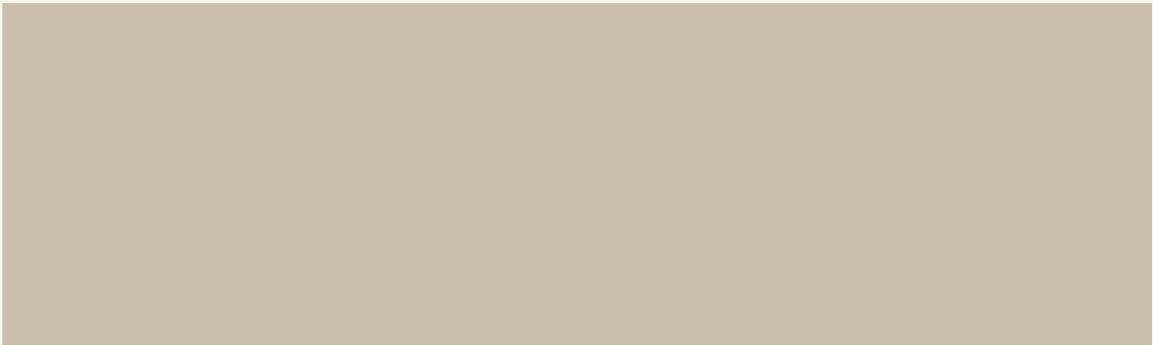
1. Which belief or pattern caused distress?



2. When does this pattern typically surface?



3. What kinder belief would support my healing?



4. How can I remind myself of this kinder belief in challenging moments?



5. What small experiment can I try next week to test it?





Practise New Skills with Kindness

STEP 7

I cultivate practical, self-loving habits, such as mindful eating and breathing exercises, that support my healing

1. Which skill did I practise this week?

2 .What effect did it have on my eating, mood, or self-relations?

3.How did I treat myself if the practice didn't go as planned?

4. What supportive phrase did I offer myself?

5. Which skill was most effective, and how can I refine it?



Accountability with Dignity

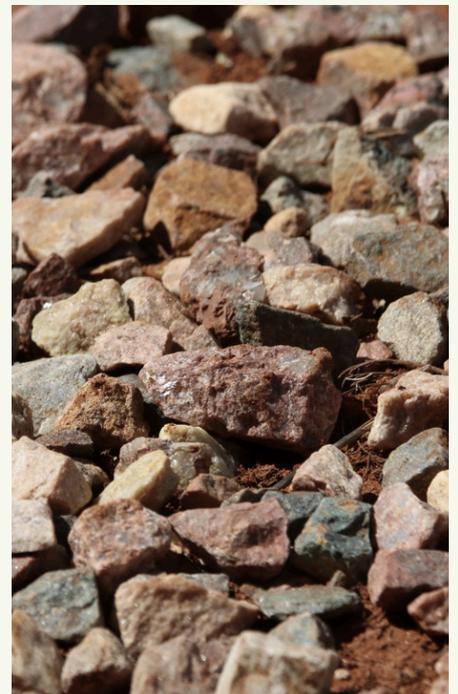
STEP 8

I take responsibility for my behaviour while
maintaining self-respect and compassion

1. What commitments or boundaries did I uphold or not?

2. How did this impact me or my relationships?

3. What commitments or boundaries did I uphold or not?



4. How can I take compassionate corrective steps?

5. What encouragement supported me in being accountable?



STEP 9 – RESTORE INTEGRITY

I take gentle steps to repair and restore trust with others or myself

1. Is there someone, or yourself, who needs a healing conversation or closure?



2. What would an honest, compassionate amends look like?

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3. How can I ensure it's emotionally safe for me to engage in this?

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4. If direct repair isn't possible, how else can I acknowledge and honour that?

A large, empty, light brown rectangular box intended for writing the answer to question 4.

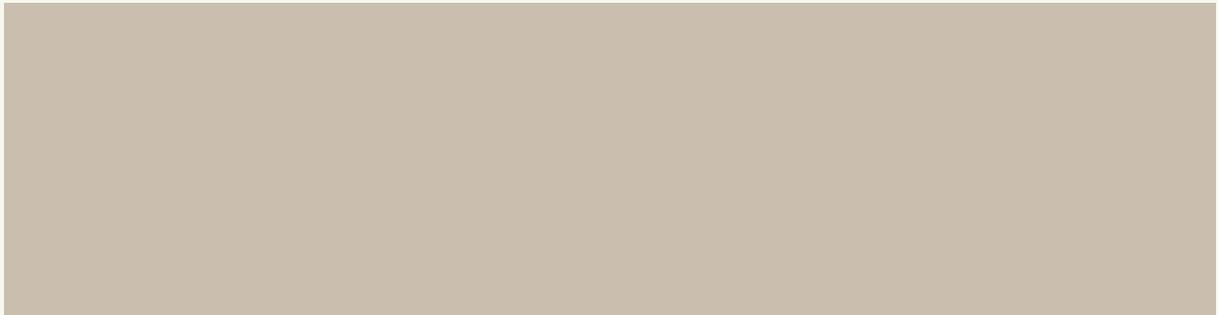
5. What strength does this bring me going forward?

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Step 10 – Monitor & Adjust Daily with Compassion

I check in with body, mind, and emotions each day and respond with self-care when needed . Questions (morning & evening):

1. How am I feeling physically, emotionally, and mentally right now?



2. Did I notice early signs of distress or automatic behaviours?



3. How did I respond, pause, reassurance, or action?



4. What can I do now to meet my needs before discomfort grows?



5. What self-compassion phrase grounded me?





Nourish Self-Compassion Daily

STEP II

Each day, I engage in practices that foster emotional resilience and self-kindness

1. What self-compassion practice did I choose today?

2. How did it affect my state of mind or body?

3. When did I feel it was most needed?

4. How did this practice affirm my worth?

5. What nourishing intention will I carry into tomorrow?



Share & Continue Growing

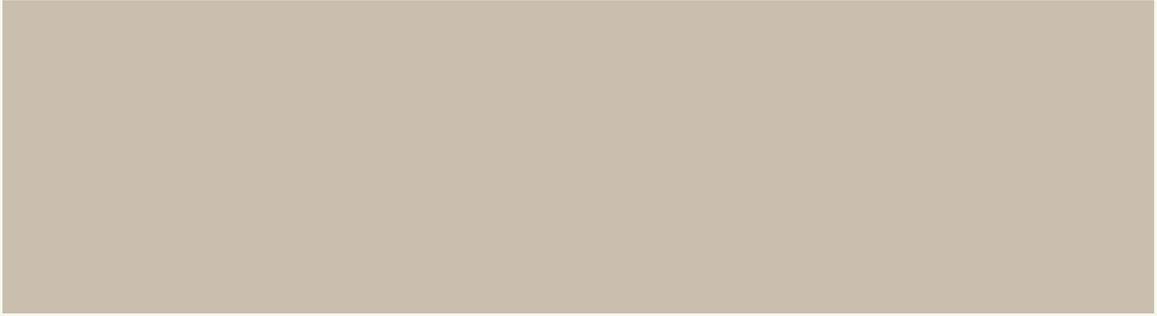
STEP 12

I support and share with others and remain
committed to growth and self-love

1. How did I support someone's healing this week?



2. What did I learn about my own process by sharing?



3. Did this enhance my sense of purpose or belonging?



4. What new practice or insight do I want to explore next?



5. How will I show up for myself next week, based on this growth?



Further Reading & Scientific Foundations

The following studies, published in respected scientific journals, support the core practices in this workbook: self-compassion, trauma awareness, mindfulness, and journaling grounded in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Adonis, M., Loucaides, M., Sullman, M. J. M. & Lajunen, T. 'The protective role of self-compassion in trauma recovery and its moderating impact on post-traumatic symptoms and post-traumatic growth', *Scientific Reports*, 15 (2025) 8145.

Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-025-91819-x>

In 413 adults with trauma exposure, higher self-compassion strengthened the link between trauma symptoms and personal growth. Even among those with significant distress, self-compassion helped transform suffering into growth. T

Aisenberg-Shafran, D. & Shturm, L. 'The effects of mindfulness meditation versus CBT for anxiety on emotional distress and attitudes toward seeking mental health treatment: a semi-randomized trial', *Scientific Reports*, 12 (2022), 19711.

Available: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-24256-9>

An investigation with older adults compared mindfulness meditation and standard CBT. Both approaches significantly reduced emotional distress. This confirms that combining mindfulness with cognitive methods practices used in this workbook, effectively supports emotional healing and resilience.



Free Online Resources

These free, secular resources offer support alongside your reflective practice, connecting with community, strengthening recovery, and easing trauma and anxiety.

A free app developed for eating disorder recovery. It allows you to record meals, emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. You can use it to follow your recovery steps, track urges, and observe patterns over time.

Access: www.recoveryrecord.eu

Secular Overeaters offers regular online meetings that follow the 12-step framework without religious language. These meetings provide community, structure, and shared experience.

Details and schedule: www.secularovereaters.org/so-meetings

The East London NHS Foundation Trust has produced a series of short videos with guided breathing and grounding techniques designed to reduce trauma-related symptoms. These can be used before journaling or meals to support emotional regulation.

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWAjU3jJdpw>

Johns Hopkins Medicine has published a full-body breathwork session to help regulate the nervous system. This practice can be used as a brief pause before engaging with emotional work or daily commitments.

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Js2c2Rs5j8>

You are not alone in this. Around the world, many of us are walking a similar path and learning to eat with presence and care.

Remember: you are not your struggles with food,
or the names you've given them.

You are not your trauma.

You are so much more than what you've been through.

And you don't have to carry it alone.

Together, with care and presence,
we can grow into something steadier, softer, real.

M.

P.S.: This workbook is shared freely in the hope that it reaches anyone who needs support, especially in moments when help feels far away or difficult to access. I know what it means to need healing and not be able to afford much.

If these pages have offered you comfort, clarity, or a quiet sense of connection, you are warmly invited to send a message or, if you feel moved, offer a small gesture of support by buying me a cup of tea and sending me a message here:

<https://buymeacoffee.com/selflovesteps>



Your words, your presence, and your support, no matter the form, truly help me continue showing up for this work, and for my own recovery (and yes, for the actual tea too!).

thank you



