

Client Coping Skills Workbook

Welcome

This workbook is your own toolkit for the moments when feelings run high, worry takes over, or life feels heavy. You will try each skill, notice what helps, and build a personal toolbox you can carry with you.

How to use it

- Go at your own pace. You do not need to finish everything, and you can skip what does not suit you.
- Write in the blank spaces. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Practise when you are calm. Skills are easier to use in hard moments if you have tried them in easy ones.
- Bring this workbook to your sessions so we can talk through what worked and what did not.
- Be kind to yourself. Healing happens through small, steady steps, not through doing everything perfectly.

If you ever feel unsafe or think about harming yourself, stop and contact someone right away. Fill in your contacts now, while you feel okay.

Who I can contact	Name	Phone
Crisis line or emergency services		
My counsellor or therapist		
A trusted person		

Workbook map

Part	What you will do
1. Check in	Rate your energy and name your feelings
2. Triggers	Spot what sets you off and choose a different response
3. Calm the body	Ground, breathe and relax

Part	What you will do
4. Worry and anxiety	Sort worries and build an anxiety action plan
5. Distress tolerance	Get through hard moments and practise acceptance
6. Self-compassion	Treat yourself like a friend and lift low mood
7. Negativity and communication	Protect your peace and ask for what you need
8. Reflection	Write to your younger self and listen to your wisest self
9. Shadow work	Meet the parts of yourself you have hidden, and learn to accept them
My toolbox	Collect what works for you

Part 1: Check in and name your feelings

Your energy and feelings are always changing. Checking in a few times a day shows you when you need to slow down, before you run empty.

Your battery check

Think of your mind and body like a phone battery. Tasks, people and stress drain it. Rest, food, water, movement and kindness recharge it.

Time of day	Battery level (0 to 100%)	One small thing to recharge
Morning		
Midday		
Evening		

- What drains my battery most?
- What recharges it fastest?
- One recharge I will do today:

Words for my feelings

Naming a feeling helps it feel smaller and easier to manage. Circle or write the words that fit right now.

Family	Words to choose from
Anger	Irritated, annoyed, agitated, resentful, outraged, furious, disgusted, raging
Uncertainty	Confused, hesitant, uncertain, doubtful, shy, indecisive, tense, embarrassed
Calm	Calm, peaceful, relaxed, content, accepting, patient, reflective, loving, self-loving
Joy	Happy, pleased, glad, amused, optimistic, joyful, grateful, delighted
Sadness	Sad, upset, unhappy, teary, weepy, lonely, heartbroken, depressed, desperate
Fear	Worried, nervous, anxious, frightened, terrified, shocked

Right now I feel:

I notice it in my body here (chest, stomach, shoulders, jaw...):

On a scale of 0 (calm) to 10 (worst stress), I am at:

Befriend your discomfort

Uncomfortable feelings are not enemies. Avoiding them usually makes them louder. When you turn toward a feeling with curiosity, you build resilience, learn what you need, and the feeling often loses some of its power.

- A feeling I usually try to avoid:
- What I do to avoid it:
- What this feeling might be telling me I need:
- One small way I can sit with it for one minute:

Emotions and how to regulate them

Everyone struggles to manage their emotional reactions sometimes. If it happens often, these five tools can help.

Step	What to do	My notes
1. Identify and name the emotion	Pause and settle into the present. Notice what you feel in your body, label the emotion, and ask what triggered it. A precise name tells you more about how to handle it.	
2. Accept, do not suppress	Your reactions are valid. Switching off uncomfortable emotions may sound appealing, but chronic avoidance puts stress on the body and can add to anxiety, low mood and poor sleep. Practise self-compassion.	
3. Respond, do not react	You get to choose how you respond. If you tend to lash out, try telling someone, "I am feeling angry", and notice how it goes.	
4. Use positive self-talk	Replace "I messed up again" with "I always try hard", and "everyone is awful" with "people are doing their best". You can stay frustrated without blaming or generalising.	
5. Try relaxation	Slow breathing activates the body's calming response. Try box breathing: in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4, repeated at least three times. It may take a few tries to notice a benefit.	

A recent time I reacted, and how I could respond next time:

Other ways to manage emotions

Approach	What it looks like	One I will try
Mindfulness	Observe your emotions and body sensations without judgement	
Cognitive restructuring	Challenge unhelpful thoughts and replace them with realistic ones	
Exercise	Regular movement reduces stress and lifts mood	
Social support	Talk to friends, family or a professional	

Approach	What it looks like	One I will try
Relaxation	Deep breathing, meditation or progressive muscle relaxation	
Self-care	Enough sleep, good food and enjoyable hobbies	

Managing emotions is a skill that grows with practice and patience. A therapist can help if you find it hard to do alone.

Part 2: Understanding your triggers

A trigger is something that sets off a strong emotional reaction, often faster than you can think. You cannot always avoid triggers, but you can choose what you do next.

The pattern

When I feel...	I often react by...	Instead I could try...
Attacked, humiliated, judged, belittled	Lashing out, blaming, getting defensive, justifying	Stepping away from the situation, naming my thoughts and feelings
Scared, anxious, overwhelmed	Catastrophising, shutting down, over-explaining	Deep breathing, grounding, a short walk
Powerless, helpless, controlled	Withdrawing, pleasing, numbing	Talking with a friend, journaling, connecting with nature
Unloved, left out, betrayed	Deflecting, attacking, beating myself up	Self-compassion, a shower, hitting a pillow or punching ball

My trigger map

Situation or person	What I felt	What I did	What I could do next time

Pause, then choose

1. Notice the warning signs in my body (heat, tight chest, clenched jaw).
2. Name the thought: "I am thinking that..."

3. Name the feeling: "I am feeling..."
4. Take one slow breath, or leave the room for a few minutes.
5. Choose a response that fits who I want to be.

My three most common warning signs:

My go-to pause skill:

The box technique

When someone is draining you, disrespecting your boundaries or being toxic, imagine placing them in a box. While they are in the box, you cannot see or hear them, even if they are sitting beside you. This gives you a few moments of mental space to breathe and decide how to respond.

- Who or what do I want to put in a box this week?
- What does my box look like?
- When will I use it?

The five-step reset for overwhelm

When you feel exhausted or overloaded, work through these steps one at a time.

Step	Question to answer
1. Gather	How do I feel in my mind and body? (Tension, headaches, poor sleep, irritability, low energy)
2. Reflect	Why might I feel this way? What am I afraid will happen if I slow down? Am I tying my worth to being productive?
3. Write	Write down my answers to step 2.
4. Recheck	What would I tell a friend in my position? What assumptions am I making?
5. Act	One thing I will change, one thing I will give up or hand to someone else, and one thing I will add that brings joy.

When someone raises their voice

A raised voice can feel overwhelming and set off your fight, flight or freeze response. If you are in a heated conversation, work through these five steps.

Step	What to do	What I could say
1. Stay calm	Take a deep breath before you respond. This helps you think clearly instead of reacting.	"Let me take a breath."
2. Use "I" statements	Describe your own feeling, not their behaviour.	"I feel scared when you yell."
3. Ask for a lower voice	Make a polite request that shows you want a respectful conversation.	"Can we talk without raising our voices?"
4. Suggest a break	If things stay loud, step away for a short time so both sides can cool down.	"Let's take a moment to cool down, then come back to this."
5. Focus on the issue	Stay on topic and avoid personal attacks.	"I want to solve the problem we are talking about."

If you ever feel unsafe, leave and get to somewhere safe. These steps are for ordinary conflict, not for danger.

My own words for steps 2 to 4:

A recent time someone raised their voice, and what I would try next time:

Part 3: Calming the body with the four elements

When you feel tense, stressed or upset, you have four quick ways to settle yourself: Earth, Air, Water and Light. Try all four in order. This exercise was developed by Dr Elan Shapiro.

Before you start: rate your stress from 0 (calm) to 10 (worst stress). Score before: ____

Element	What to do	Why it helps
Earth (ground)	Feel your feet on the floor and your hands on your clothes or chair. Name three things you can see, one thing you can hear, and one thing you can smell.	Brings you back to the present moment

Element	What to do	Why it helps
Air (breathe)	Take four slow belly breaths. Rest a hand on your tummy and feel it rise as you breathe in. Breathe in for about 3 seconds and out for about 3 seconds.	Slow breathing settles your nervous system. If you feel dizzy, slow down.
Water (sip)	Take a drink of water, or notice your mouth making saliva.	Stress dries the mouth. Saliva tells your body it is safe to calm down.
Light (imagine)	Picture a safe, calm place, real or imagined. Notice what you see, hear, feel and smell there. Find where in your body you feel the good feeling. Choose a word or phrase that brings the place back.	Lights up your imagination and builds a calm memory you can return to

After you finish: rate your stress again. Score after: ____

My safe place

- Where is it?
- What do I see, hear, feel and smell there?
- Where in my body do I feel calm?
- My reminder word or phrase:

More ways to ground and settle

- 5-4-3-2-1: name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell and 1 you taste.
- Box breathing: breathe in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4.
- A short walk, a warm shower, or time in nature.

When you feel disconnected: dissociation and grounding

Dissociation means feeling disconnected from the here and now. Everyone daydreams or zones out sometimes, and that is normal. It becomes a problem when it is your main way of coping. It happens because your mind perceives danger and pulls away to lower fear, anxiety and shame. You are not dangerous, and you are not broken.

Signs I might be dissociating

- Spacing out, staring or a glazed look
- My mind going blank or wandering
- The world feeling unreal

- Watching myself from outside, or feeling detached from my body or identity
- Feeling cut off from my surroundings

My own early signs:

Grounding techniques

Grounding pulls you away from distressing feelings, flashbacks and unwanted memories, and brings you back to the present.

Type	Ideas	My favourites
Physical	Touch or pick up nearby objects. Breathe deeply for 3 minutes (square breathing, or blowing out candles or bubbles). Tense and relax muscle groups. Rub your hands together or do a body scan. Try 5-4-3-2-1.	
Mental	Think in categories (ice-cream flavours, instruments, flowers). Count backward from 100. Describe a familiar task step by step, such as making a favourite meal. Use a three-step breathing space: How is my mind? How am I feeling? How is my body? Then breathe.	
Soothing	Say kind wishes to yourself: "May I be safe, may I be happy, may I be loved." List your favourite foods, music, people, animals and places. List good things in your life. Listen to music.	

My anchoring phrase

Complete these sentences out loud, using plain facts:

- I am...
- I live in...
- Today is...
- The time is...
- The weather is...
- I am sitting...

Tips for grounding

- Practise often. The more you do it, the better it works.
- Start at the first sign of distress.
- Stick to plain facts about your surroundings instead of how you feel about them.

- Check in with yourself before and after, with a 0 to 10 score.
- Keep your eyes open and both feet on the ground.

Date	Technique	Before (0-10)	After (0-10)

If you are with someone who dissociates: stay calm, speak softly, do not get angry or try to reason with them, tell them they are safe, and ask kindly what would help.

Nervous system regulating activities

These gentle exercises use your senses, voice, breath and movement to help your body feel safe. Practise them when you are calm so they feel familiar when you need them. Stop any exercise that makes you feel dizzy or uncomfortable.

Type	Activity	How to do it	How it helps
Mindfulness	Sensory orientation	Feel your feet on the floor and your seat on the chair. Notice what you see, hear, smell and taste, and the fabric on your skin. Move your attention between your body and the room.	Shifts attention to the present, away from disruptive thoughts
Mindfulness	Visualisation	Close your eyes and picture a safe place in nature, such as waves, leaves or a mountain. Know that you can return to it with your breath.	Nature-based imagery can reduce anxiety
Voice	Humming	Hum a familiar tune, even off-key. Notice the vibration in your head, throat and chest. Try different volumes.	Vibration stimulates the vagus nerve, which helps calm the body
Voice	Singing or chanting	Breathe in, then sing or chant "Om" or a favourite phrase on the out-breath, for 1 to 3 minutes.	Slow, steady breath and voice settle the heart and nervous system

Type	Activity	How to do it	How it helps
Breathing	Box breath	Breathe out fully. In for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4. Repeat 3 to 4 times. Do not hold your breath if you are pregnant or feel lightheaded.	Rhythmic breathing regulates stress reactions
Breathing	Resonance breathing	In for 5 seconds and out for 5 seconds (six breaths a minute) for several minutes.	Builds resilience to stress
Movement	Releasing the neck	Roll your shoulders up, back and down. Slowly tip your right ear toward your right shoulder. Look to the right and take 4 to 6 deep breaths, feeling the left side of your neck lengthen. Return to centre and repeat on the other side.	Eases tight neck muscles
Movement	Ear massage	Gently pull each ear away from your head and compare. Make small circles in the hollow above the ear canal, then press softly toward the back of your head near the canal. Repeat on the other ear and check again.	Gentle touch can bring on relaxation

Activity I tried	What I noticed in my body	Would I use it again?

Practice log

Date	Element(s) tried	Stress before (0-10)	Stress after (0-10)	What I noticed

Part 4: Managing worry and anxiety

Worry feels urgent, but not every worry needs your energy right now. The worry tree helps you sort what you can act on from what you can set down.

The worry tree

1. Notice when you are getting caught up in worries.
2. Ask: what is the worry about?
3. Ask: can I do something about it?
 - **No:** put the worry to one side. Breathe, ground yourself, or move on to something that absorbs you.
 - **Yes, and I can act now:** decide what to do, do it, then put the worry to one side.
 - **Yes, but later:** decide what to do, schedule it in a specific time and place, then put the worry to one side.

My worry	Can I do something? (Yes or No)	If yes: what, and when?	If no: how I will set it aside

My anxiety action plan

Anxiety comes in levels, and different tools suit each one. Choose your own tools for every level so you do not have to think when you are struggling. The examples are starting points.

Level	What it feels like	Examples of tools	My tools
1. Mild	Nervous and uneasy, but I can still function	Deep breathing, positive self-talk, a short walk, journaling	

Level	What it feels like	Examples of tools	My tools
2. Moderate	It is hard to concentrate	5-4-3-2-1 grounding, progressive muscle relaxation, talking to a trusted friend, visualisation	
3. Severe	Anxiety is intense and daily tasks are hard	Slow breathing (in for 4, hold for 7, out for 8), art or puzzles, calming music, contacting my therapist	
4. Emergency	Overwhelmed, breathing fast, feeling like a panic attack	Breathe in for 4 and out for 6, splash water on my face, call a support person, get urgent help if needed	

My early warning signs for each level:

The person I will call at level 4:

Coping skills that work for me

There are six main styles of coping. A healthy mix works better than relying on just one.

Style	What it means	Example	One I could try
Problem-focused	Tackle the cause of the stress	Make a plan after a poor work review	
Emotion-focused	Calm the feelings	Deep breathing, meditation	
Social support	Reach out to others	Talk to a friend or family member	
Cognitive restructuring	Change how I think about it	Replace "I failed" with "I am still learning"	
Physical or behavioural	Use my body or hobbies	Exercise, painting, gardening, cooking	
Avoidance	Steer clear of the stressor. Useful for a short break, but it does not solve the problem.	Distracting myself while I put off a task	

Part 5: Distress tolerance and radical acceptance

Sometimes you cannot change a situation right now. In those moments, the goal is to get through safely without making things worse. The ACCEPTS skill, from dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), gives you seven ways to do that.

The ACCEPTS skill

Letter	Skill	Ideas	My list (3 to 5 ideas each)
A	Activities	Walk, cook, puzzle, call a friend, draw, play a sport, do yoga	
C	Contributing	Help a friend, volunteer, send an encouraging message, do something kind for someone	
C	Comparisons	Remember a time I felt worse and got through it. Remember what I have already survived.	
E	Emotions	Watch a comedy, listen to uplifting or soothing music, read a funny card or a favourite story	
P	Pushing away	Put the problem in an imaginary box on a shelf for now. Leave the situation for a while. Build a mental wall and promise to return to it later.	
T	Thoughts	Count to 10, count colours in the room, do a puzzle, recite song words in my head	
S	Sensations	Squeeze a stress ball, take a warm shower, listen to music, smell a strong scent such as mint or coffee	

Pushing away is for short breaks only. The aim is to come back to the problem when you are calmer.

ACCEPTS practice log

Situation	Skill I chose	Intensity before (0-10)	Intensity after (0-10)	What I noticed

Activity ideas for when I am stuck

Tick the ones you would like to try.

- ☐ Write in a journal
- ☐ Go for a walk or hike
- ☐ Watch the sunrise or sunset
- ☐ Draw, paint or knit
- ☐ Cook or bake something
- ☐ Call or visit a friend
- ☐ Play a board game or cards
- ☐ Do a puzzle
- ☐ Listen to a podcast or new music
- ☐ Take photos
- ☐ Read a book
- ☐ Visit a park, beach or library
- ☐ Do yoga or meditate
- ☐ Care for a pet or work in the garden
- ☐ Write a letter or a poem
- ☐ Try a new food

Radical acceptance

Radical acceptance means accepting a fact fully, in your mind and heart, without judging it. It does not mean you like it or approve of it. It means you stop fighting reality so you can put your energy into coping.

Person	Resisting reality	Radical acceptance
Rodney, after a divorce	Calls his ex daily and tells himself she is going through a phase	Accepts she has moved on, stops calling, rebuilds with friends and family. Lonely days still come, and he lets them.
Ashley, after a life-changing diagnosis	Keeps asking "why me?" and "this isn't fair", growing angry and resentful	Sees that these questions do not change the facts and only add pain. She puts her energy into the changes she can make.
Tim, struggling at school	Complains about his teacher and insists on doing things his way, and fails the class	Accepts the grading style, meets the teacher and adapts so he can pass

My turn

Question	My answer
Something I am resisting right now	
What is the plain fact of the situation?	
How does fighting it hurt me?	
One thing I can do that is within my control	
A sentence to help me accept it (for example: "This is how it is right now, and I can cope.")	

Part 6: Self-compassion and lifting low mood

When you feel low, it is easy to be hard on yourself. The harder things feel, the more kindness you need. Low mood is not your fault, and small steps taken kindly add up.

What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion means treating yourself with the kindness and understanding you would offer a good friend who is struggling. You turn toward your own pain with warmth and care instead of judgement or avoidance. The model below comes from self-compassion researcher Kristin Neff.

Element	What it means	A thought to try	My own version
Mindfulness	Notice you are struggling without ignoring or exaggerating the pain	"This is really hard for me right now."	
Common humanity	Remember that pain, mistakes and imperfection are part of being human	"I am not alone in feeling this way. Everyone struggles sometimes."	
Kindness	Respond with warmth instead of criticism	"How can I comfort and care for myself right now?"	

Self-compassion or self-criticism?

Self-compassion	Self-criticism
Encourages growth from a place of care	Triggers shame and discouragement
Accepts human imperfection	Demands unrealistic perfection
Motivates through support	Motivates through fear

When a friend suffers, you notice, feel compassion and respond with kindness. With self-compassion, you do the same for yourself.

The self-compassion U-turn

1. **Notice:** "I am feeling stressed, sad or overwhelmed."
2. **Acknowledge:** "This is part of being human."
3. **Respond kindly:** "What would help me feel supported right now?"

A recent moment I could try the U-turn on:

My three steps for that moment:

Small self-compassion practices

- ☐ Place a hand on my heart and take a few slow breaths
- ☐ Write myself a short note of encouragement
- ☐ Speak to myself as I would to a dear friend
- ☐ Ask myself, "What do I need right now?"

Perfection is not the goal. You will face challenges, make mistakes and feel pain, just like everyone else. You deserve kindness, especially from yourself.

Words of kindness

Read these slowly, and say them to yourself as you would to someone you love:

- It is okay to feel what you feel.
- It is okay to rest and go slow.
- You do not have to share any details.
- It is your choice, and I support you.
- One breath at a time.

The phrase I most need to hear today:

1. Start with compassion

- One kind thing I can say to myself right now (if you are stuck, imagine what you would say to a friend):
- How might this kindness change how I feel or what I do next?

2. Shift my inner dialogue

A harsh thought I had recently	How I would say it to a friend

3. Choose the opposite action

Low mood pulls you toward isolating and doing nothing. A small step in the opposite direction can shift your momentum.

What the voice of low mood tells me to do	A small opposite step I can take
For example: "Do not call anyone."	For example: send one message to a friend

4. Question my thoughts

A thought can feel true without being true.

- A recurring negative thought:
- Could this be low mood talking, not the truth?
- A thought that feels even slightly better:

5. Connect with safe people

- Who feels safe and supportive in my life?
- If no one comes to mind, one small step I can take to build support:

6. Care for my body

Habit	This week I will...	Tick when done
Water and food		☐
Sleep and rest		☐
Gentle movement or fresh air		☐
Hygiene and small routines		☐

How does my body respond when it gets a little care?

Relief does not come from doing everything at once or doing it perfectly. It comes from small, kind steps at your own pace.

Part 7: Dealing with negativity and communicating your needs

Negativity can come from other people and from your own mind. It often grows from dissatisfaction, constant comparison and feeling misunderstood. Seeing it clearly is the first step to reclaiming your peace.

Seven negative patterns

Everyone slips into these sometimes. Having a pattern does not define you. It points to something you can work on.

Pattern	What it looks like	I notice it in... (me, someone else, both)
Complainer	Voices dissatisfaction without looking for solutions	
Canceller	Twists compliments into negatives and doubts praise	
Casualty	Feels victimised and blames outside forces	
Critic	Judges other people's opinions and choices	
Commander	Pressures others to meet unrealistic expectations	

Pattern	What it looks like	I notice it in... (me, someone else, both)
Competitor	Compares constantly and puts others down to feel better	
Controller	Tries to dictate how others behave or who they spend time with	

Clearing the cloud

Strategy	What it means	My plan
Dig to the root	Observe your reactions without judgement. Separate what is happening around you from how you respond inside.	
Create safe distance	Step back, physically and emotionally, from draining people and places.	
Balance my circle	For every draining influence, build three uplifting relationships.	
Limit time	If you cannot remove someone, choose when and how long you see them, ideally when you feel most grounded.	
Stop trying to fix everyone	You cannot support everyone. Protect your boundaries and your energy.	

Who are the three most uplifting people in my life?

Who drains me, and how can I limit my time with them?

Setting boundaries

Before you say yes to a request, pause and ask:

- What would this involve?
- Do I really have the time and energy?
- Will it add value to my life or goals?
- Do I want to do this, or am I just trying to please?

Saying no does not make you lazy, selfish or mean. Choosing your commitments protects your wellbeing.

A "to-don't" list: things I will stop, give away or say no to this month:

DEAR MAN: ask for what you need

DEAR MAN is a DBT skill for communicating clearly and keeping healthy relationships.

Letter	What to do	My script
Describe	Stick to the facts. Say exactly what you are reacting to.	
Express	Share your feelings and opinions. Do not assume the other person knows.	
Assert	Ask clearly for what you want, or say "no" clearly. Others cannot read your mind.	
Reinforce	Explain the positive effects of getting what you ask for.	
Mindful	Stay on your goal. Repeat your point calmly like a broken record. Ignore attacks and distractions.	
Appear confident	Use a steady voice, good eye contact and upright posture.	
Negotiate	Be willing to give to get. Offer another solution or a smaller request.	

The situation I will practise with, and the person:

How it went:

Part 8: Reflection and values

These two exercises are gentler and deeper. Take your time, and stop whenever you need to. You can share your writing with your therapist, or keep it private.

Letter to my younger self

Hurt that stays locked away with your younger self can come out in unexpected ways, such as anger. Think of a time you were hurting and had no one to help you. What did you need to hear? Write the letter you wish someone had written to you.

Use these starters, and change them to fit:

- Dear ____ (my name or age at that time),
- You did not deserve...
- It was not your fault, because...
- That experience made things harder for you in these ways: (list three)

- It was okay to feel...
- I wish someone had told you...
- I love you no matter what. To help you feel safe, loved and cared for, I will...

My letter:

How did it feel to write this?

Your wisest self

Imagine you are near the end of a long, fulfilling life. You want to offer guidance to the person you are today. Answer as your older, wiser self.

Question	My wisest self answers
Looking back, what accomplishments, experiences or realisations mattered most?	
How do I hope my loved ones remember me?	
What advice do I give my younger, present-day self?	
Based on this advice, which goals or values matter most?	
What steps can I take now to honour them?	

Part 9: Shadow work

Your shadow is the part of you that you learned to hide or deny, often in childhood, because someone you loved called it "bad" or "wrong". It can hold difficult traits such as anger, jealousy or selfishness. It can also hold gifts that were never rewarded, such as creativity or a strong need for attention and care. When you do not know your shadow, you tend to project it onto others and judge the same traits in them. This exercise comes from Dr Nicole LePera's Shadow Work Journal. The goal is to see, acknowledge and accept all of yourself.

Go gently. These questions can bring up strong memories and feelings. Stop at any time, take a few slow breaths, and bring this work to a session if it feels like too much.

Guilt and shame

Guilt says, "I did something wrong." Shame says, "I am wrong." Guilt can help you repair a mistake. Shame erodes your sense of self. Practise separating who you are from what you did, for example: "I am lovable even when I make a mistake."

A time I felt shame, and what I can tell myself instead:

Step 1: Meet your shadow

Some answers will come later. Return to these as often as you like.

Question	My reflection
What are the worst traits or behaviours a person can have?	
Which traits or behaviours do I dislike in myself?	
Which traits in others do I envy, or wish I had?	
What am I most proud of, and what does it say about me?	
When I was young, what happened when I felt foolish, stupid or embarrassed? What did I believe about myself?	
How do I treat failure and mistakes? Do I accept them as part of life, or am I consumed by fear of them?	
What makes me feel most insecure?	
What did people say was "wrong" or "bad" about me when I was young? Am I still trying to change it?	
What did my parents or carers admire and praise (success, money, strength, achievement, self-sacrifice)?	
What do I idealise now, and how do I try to live up to it?	
How easily did I fit in growing up? Why do I think I was accepted or rejected?	

Step 2: Witness your shadow in action

Most of what we do meets an unmet need. Complete each sentence, then look for a pattern.

Sentence starter	My answer
I mostly consume content about _____, and the emotional payoff is feeling _____	
In my closest relationships we usually bond over _____, and the payoff is feeling _____	
When I post on social media I mostly post about _____, and the payoff is feeling _____	
When I am alone I usually think about _____, and the payoff is feeling _____	
When I talk negatively about someone it is usually about _____, and the payoff is feeling _____	

What pattern do I notice? (Feeling justified, angry, superior or "less than"? No feeling is wrong. We all have them.)

Well done. It takes courage to look at the harder parts of yourself.

Step 3: Affirmations for integrating my shadow

Sit somewhere comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Say each statement out loud or silently, and notice how it would feel in your body if it were true. Circle the ones that matter most.

- It is safe for me to feel angry. Anger helps me protect myself and set clear boundaries.
- I am worthy and lovable even when I make mistakes.
- I can slow down and take deep breaths when I am overwhelmed.
- I have a choice in how I respond, and I choose to be kind to myself.
- I am showing up for the younger version of me who had no one to show up for them.
- I forgive myself for what I did in survival mode.
- All parts of me got me to where I am today, and I am proud of me.
- Everything I feel is valid, and I trust myself to cope with stressful emotions.
- I am learning, growing and evolving every day.
- I did not deserve what happened to me, and as an adult I can make healthy choices now.

Step 4: Accepting my shadow

Free-write without judging yourself.

Prompt	My answer
One way I will be kinder to myself is...	
Something I really appreciate about myself is...	
Something others appreciate in me is...	
Even though my childhood was not perfect, it taught me that...	
One kind, encouraging thing I would say to my younger self is...	
When I am in a shame cycle and beating myself up, I will stop and remind myself...	
When something someone said or did hurts me, I will be there for myself by...	
I no longer need to be perfect, and I will show this to myself by...	
I am aware of my wounds, and also of my gifts. Some of my gifts are...	

A letter to my 10-year-old self

Tell them you are there for them, you know what happened, and they are worthy and lovable exactly as they are. If you feel the urge to cry, let yourself, and let the feelings come without judgement.

Dear 10-year-old me,

My personal toolbox

Look back through the workbook and collect what helped you most. Keep this page where you can find it fast, such as a photo on your phone.

When I am...	My first tool	If that is not enough	Who I can call
Triggered or angry			
Anxious or worried			
Low or flat			
Overwhelmed or burnt out			

When I am...	My first tool	If that is not enough	Who I can call
In a hard moment I cannot change			

My three biggest takeaways:

One thing I am proud of from this workbook:

What I want to talk about next session:

You have taken a brave step by working on this. Keep practising, keep being kind to yourself, and return to these pages whenever you need them.

Sources and credits. This workbook adapts ideas from Therapist Aid (radical acceptance, activity list, wisest self), DBT.tools (ACCEPTS skill), Supportiv (letter to your younger self), Dr Elan Shapiro (four elements), the Seafarer Help worry tree and Andrea Wachter, LMFT (depression coping strategies), along with your clinician's own handouts. It is a self-help guide and does not replace professional care.