

# The Post-Traumatic Gazette No. 18

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## Symptoms of Increased Arousal: Letting Go: Acting Instead of Reacting

Trying to suppress PTSD makes it stronger. All your brainpower can become absorbed in the fight not to be who you are; not to have the normal reactions to what you have been through.

Arousal symptoms are reactions to the gut-wrenching, sphincter-releasing fear of obliteration instinctive in every living thing. (People who are not aware of this feeling have had practice in numbing it.) Since they are also survival skills, letting them go is difficult.

After traumatic experiences, even when there is no threat, your body may keep jerking you into states of arousal. If you have struggled for years not to be hyperalert, jumpy, angry, unable to sleep or to concentrate, perhaps you can't force yourself into not having such symptoms. You may believe they are something you will have to endure for the rest of your life.

If you have learned these survival skills, it proves you are fast and skillful and smart and lucky. With that in mind, you can begin looking for the skills of peace that you might like to learn, adding them to your repertory.

If you learned war, (and most hyperalert symptoms are war skills, even if it was war at home) you can learn peace.

If you learned distrust, you can learn to trust some people. Trust has to be earned. (Over time they will act in trustworthy ways. They won't say "You should trust me," "Don't feel that," or "Get over it!")

One way of interrupting and disempowering these symptoms is to create a way of thinking and talking about them that is healing. This takes several steps.

What are you feeling in your body when the symptom occurs? What emotions? Can you talk about what you feel or is it a forbidden subject which makes it an unspeakable dilemma? Perhaps there is a double bind in your assumptions about the world that keeps you stuck, unhealed. Finding

those assumptions can help you let them go and create a new way of thinking in which you can heal.

Permission to talk about your trauma is a necessary part of healing. Many people are stuck because they believe that they “should be over it,” whatever “it” is. Families often reinforce this false idea. Others are paralyzed by the idea that since a therapist or doctor couldn’t make the symptom go away, it will never change. Or there may have been some part of their trauma that was never addressed, even in therapy, and is therefore unspeakable. Or they think, “I’m a loser. I’m weak, etc.” or “I should have done this, shouldn’t have done that.”

Look at what ideas might be making your trauma unspeakable, where and when you got those ideas, and how society reinforces them. Think about whether each is a freeing idea or a subjugating one. Would you prefer to be guided by those ideas or by different ones? What other sources of knowledge about PTSD have you located in your life that are helpful to you? (The Gazette for one.) How can they help you to think differently?

Separating society’s expectations and your automatic thoughts from your sense of yourself as a person will help. You are not just your attitudes, expectations, problems, feelings, or thoughts anymore than you are just your nose— although it can be harder to see that.

“It is normal to be affected by trauma,” is a healing way of thinking. “I can heal if I search out ways that work for me,” is another.

When you identify ways of thinking or of acting that have kept you stuck, visualize each as a lopsided ineffective bicycle you’ve been trying to ride or a sticky web of bad ideas, something outside of you. See it clearly. It isn’t you! Shove it away or leave it behind. Remind yourself whenever it comes back that it was ineffective and you can leave it behind.

Another possible way to sidestep survivor skills is to try new actions (the skills of peace) and let go of old reactions. Engage your brain in new patterns and new experiences. Your old reactions may wither away from lack of attention. Steven Stosny Ph.D. says it is impossible for your brain to be doing two incompatible things at once. Slowly you can develop other parts of you that have been shortchanged over the years because of living with PTSD.

Let go of trying to control your reactions, accept them as evidence of how hard your experiences were for you, and one tiny step at a time, try

new actions that interest you. Take small enough steps so you feel safe. Think of what you once liked or something that looks like fun and say to yourself: “It would be nice if I could get absorbed in that.

At first it will be slow, hard, and possibly scary.

Some people find changing their focus will give their feelings and unspoken assumptions a chance to emerge on their own. They can then be identified, externalized and released.

Practice being a human being instead of a war machine or a punching bag or whatever role your particular trauma left you feeling stuck in. Babies don’t quit trying to walk when they can’t do it the first time. They practice and they learn. So can you.

Letting go of something is not suppressing it. As a matter of fact, for me, it has been the reverse of suppressing. My experience with suppression (“Don’t feel that!” “Don’t do that!”) has been that whatever “that” was got stronger. I think that is why so many trauma survivors cannot make themselves less hypervigilant no matter how hard they try. That’s why I titled this article “Letting Go. “

The concept of letting go is a part of 12 step programs which has changed my life. My perceptions of how I should be (perfect) and how easy it should be to change (instantly) seemed to be ineffective in getting me what I wanted. They did not work. I had to let go of my ideas and look outside my own head for help. (Try it.)

It was hard because I knew I was right. That’s called emotional reasoning. “I feel it therefore it must be true.”

For veterans and other trauma survivors the world is often viewed through the lens of trauma, coloring it in dark tones, skewing the picture in favor of violence and anger (both because anger helps you fight and because of the tremendous injustice of it all) and danger. Letting go of such perceptions is difficult work because they are reactions to real life-threatening experiences.

Here is how I learned to let go. Step 6 says “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character,” and Step 7 says “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. “ (Please don’t confuse the word humble with being humiliated. We have all had enough humiliation. Humble means *human, neither above or below anyone else and teachable.*)

What I heard back then when those steps were read was “Made myself perfect.” (My perceptions!) Then I heard someone at a meeting say, “In these steps, we don’t do anything except *become willing* and *humbly ask*.” That was a big surprise to me. I thought I was supposed to erase my character defects by hard work—yet the ones that were giving me less trouble were ones that had sort of withered away as I focused on new actions.

Each trauma survivor might ask, “Am I willing to let go of these survival skills?” It is a big question. They kept you alive. My fear was that if I didn’t do what I’d always done, who would I be? I was afraid to change. Most people are. Looking at what my survival skills had done *for* me (helped me survive) and what they were doing *to* me today (making me miserable) helped me be willing. Write it down in black and white to make it clear.

At this point in a 12 step program some people get down on their knees and ask the God of their understanding for help to let go. Others of us ask the library or listen in meetings for new actions we can take. The harmony of the universe will bring me plenty of new ideas for action if I am open to them. Taking new actions was hard work, too, much harder than I expected. It helped me to tell myself that I was just going to try it today. Doing something for a day is doable.

I found help from people who had what I wanted and from people I didn’t even like! I did some of the things they had done. I felt willing to change. I asked for help in changing when I did my daily meditation. Both of these were big changes for me. I found myself letting go of my old ways. I have no idea why it worked, except that I was no longer trying to suppress everything about myself that didn’t meet my unrealistic expectations. It helped me to hear that “want to,” and “willing” are two different words, (spelled differently, mean different things). I could be willing to—and actually do—things I didn’t want to do. Like asking for help.

I don’t think the 12 Steps are the only way to change, although they were certainly the only way that worked for me. I’m a hard case, very sure my way was the right way. I’ve seen Bob change through meditation. You need to find what works for you.

I went into this rather elaborate discussion of changing, because I’ve never seen anyone say, “OK, no more anger, no more sleepless nights, no

more startle responses,” and have instant success—or even slow success. People’s brains just do not work that way. It takes time to recover. It takes time to convince your better-safe-than-sorry brain that it is safe. Lecturing won’t do it. Thinking won’t do it. Action will: healthy action, not old reactions like, “Get over it.”.

Drinking and drugging, unhealthy actions which many people use to control PTSD symptoms, are forms of suppression which are only effective in the short term and can carry terrible long term consequences.

Pretending the world is totally safe would be another form of suppression. I don’t think trying to do the opposite of what you do now is necessarily best, either. That can be a form of suppression. You need to develop your own program of healthy action. Look with compassion at where you are now, and how you were trained to survive by your experiences. Look at things you would like to be able to do. Ask how other people do them. Combine them with the skills and resources you have now to create your own way.

Here are some suggestions you may not have tried for dealing with the five PTSD arousal symptoms:

**1-Difficulty falling or staying asleep:**

Go to sleep and get up at the same time every day.

Just sleep in your bed. Read and watch TV elsewhere.

Get up if you aren’t sleepy so you don’t associate bed with wakefulness. Don’t take naps. It will make it harder to get to sleep.

Don’t drink caffeine for at least six hours before bed. Most sodas and some juices have caffeine.

Don’t smoke for a few hours before bed. Nicotine is a stimulant.

Don’t use over the counter sleep meds, illegal drugs or booze. They don’t increase stage four sleep which you need the most.

Don’t watch the clock or worry about when you have to get up.

Use relaxation techniques like deep breathing, soothing music, progressive muscle relaxation and imagining yourself in a safe space.

Develop a soothing phrase to say over and over to calm yourself and replace obsessive thoughts. If negative thoughts rise, replace them with your soothing phrase.

Develop a soothing bedtime routine, a bath, good music. What did you like as a kid?

Since this was written a new therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia, has been developed and is pretty effective.

### **2-Irritability or outbursts of anger:**

Smile. Moving the muscles in your face into a smile even when you are not happy changes your mood.

HEALS, see issue 7

Letting go of rage reactions goes hand in hand with finding and accepting your feelings. Survivors have to become aware of their natural, normal, body-based fear in order to deal with it in less instinctive ways. Awareness of fear can be extra hard if you are a combat veteran or a really tough survivor of repeated traumas like sexual abuse, battering, gang violence, etc. If you think, "It didn't bother me," issues 13 through 15 on numbness might be helpful. The solution to anger and rage is compassion, first for yourself as a survivor of trauma, and then for others. You can't be enraged and compassionate at the same time. (If you think you can, you are probably being self-righteous.) Compassion is a skill and therefore has to be learned and practiced continuously until it is second nature.

Practice taking deep long slow breaths. This lowers your heart rate and helps your frontal lobes keep functioning.

### **3-Difficulty Concentrating:**

Break up whatever you are trying to focus on into smaller segments. Clean one eighth of a room. Do a sixteenth of a job.

In the book, *Unf\*ck Your Habitat*, they recommend 20/10's: work for twenty, rest for ten, or vice versa, depending on what works best for you.

Keep a list of things you need to do and check them off.

Study for 15 minutes and then stretch or move around the room.

If you have trouble listening to your family, learn to paraphrase, to listen and say back to them what they said. It is self-correcting if your perceptions skew what they meant, too. Tell them you have trouble concentrating and this is a way to practice listening better. Most people like to be listened to.

Listen to Mozart. His music has a measurable effect on your ability to learn.

### **4-Hypervigilance:**

Develop some phrases to repeat that help you remember you are no longer in the trauma. “I am safe here.” Keep them on a card in your pocket.

One day at a time, try to do more and more safe things, to remove yourself from dangerous situations. Or pick safer dangers like rock climbing with good equipment instead of drunken driving and bar fights. Make hypervigilance fun instead of painful.

If you can't get away from the danger, hypervigilance is appropriate. Try acceptance.

### **5-Exaggerated startle response:**

Tell people, “I'm a combat veteran/come from a violent home/have experienced violence. It isn't wise to touch me without letting me know,” or, “I have a startle response. Don't touch me without asking.” This is fair warning and polite people will heed it.

Shame is often associated with having a startle response, but the startle response is proof you went through hell and survived. You may feel shame but don't believe it. Believe the pride in surviving.

Noises may always give you a problem, but that is natural. If your startle response gets more intense, check out your life for increased stress and take what steps you can to lessen it.

### **Other ideas:**

Basic training was eight weeks. AIT was another eight weeks or so. OJT in Vietnam was a year or 13 months depending on your branch of service. Korean War vets and WWII vets were in the military longer. Our current vets have had multiple deployments. I would expect *basic untraining* to take a year or two of constant practice of peace and tranquility in your life—or maybe longer. As a matter of fact, people who begin to practice meditation expect to spend years learning it.

**Design your own basic untraining program.** If you have military training, practice reversing it: sauntering around, slouching, missing when you throw, not being on time, taking naps when you are tired, saying no, not taking things seriously— If this seems ridiculous, try the one that seems easiest for a day, and then maybe another day.

Be creative. Instead of checking your perimeter every night with weapons, you could do it playing a flute (or a tuba) or carrying incense or sage as a smudge, creating a ceremony for safety instead of a patrol.

For non-veterans, spotting the patterns you learned in order to cope with your traumas will help you plan your own sort of basic untraining.

I think the skills of peace, the ability to live in the now with what is, instead of projecting traumatic thinking into every situation and place, the ability to trust others, etc. are harder to learn because they are simply not as exciting as the skills of war. “I’m practicing being safe,” is far less exciting than practicing skydiving.

You must learn the difference between trust and gullibility. Abusive people and institutions are always saying “Trust me. “ Gullibility is trusting authority or believing what you are told because you heard it from someone nice or someone in authority or someone who has been through what you have been through. Gullibility is a natural part of childhood which people outgrow as they mature and learn that trust has to be earned. It is tragic when it is ripped away as it was in Vietnam or is in violent families. True trust is earned over a period of time through observation and experience with an individual or institution. You can, however, always trust people to be human and therefore less than perfect.

There is a lot of emphasis these days on the changes in brain chemistry which trauma survivors have. If you’ve been told by a professional, “This is as good as it will ever get for you, so you must learn to live with this level of pain and dysfunction,” it would be gullible to believe it. New effective approaches to trauma therapy are being developed every day. If you are looking, you may also find something outside therapy that will help you heal.

Never give up! Studies show that the brain can grow and change at any age. It grows and changes when exposed to new ideas and situations. Expose your brain to new ideas, new situations, new tools!

Learning new skills and using new tools takes time and practice. No one changes overnight.

Here are 10 simple tools for reducing stress which you can use in the privacy of your own home. Some may seem silly. Hope you try them.

**1-Smile**—moving the muscles in your face into a smile changes your mood.

**2-Stretch**—it releases muscular tension.

**3-Stand up and walk around.** Ditto.

**4-Go outside** and look at plants and trees. They keep growing, even from a stump or out of concrete. I like the example they set.

**5-Say “I love myself,”** once a day. If you find this difficult, picture yourself at the age you were traumatized and love that version of yourself. You didn’t cause it, you didn’t want it, and you didn’t deserve it!

**6-Dance** yourself around the room.

**7-Listen to Mozart** or another musician you wouldn’t usually.

**8-Cry**—it changes your body chemistry.

**9-Put your arms** around yourself, pat yourself on the shoulder and say “I don’t have to be perfect.” I do this when I make mistakes and say, “Good girl! You are working on your perfectionism!” Perfection is the enemy of recovery.

**10-Turn off the TV.** People who watch TV are often depressed.

**Repetition is also tool.** If you have had good periods when your symptoms were not so painful, and they start coming up again, do what has worked in the past if it was healthy and safe. Go back to therapy. Exercise more. Whatever. There is a natural human tendency to slack off doing something, and then think “It didn’t work,” when actually, it worked, but you’re not doing it anymore. If something helped you yesterday, do it again today.

You can also repeatedly expose yourself to safety, being with safe people in safe places, instead of dangerous people in rough places. Make your life steady and boring. If you are addicted to excitement, you will find that out. Then you can write about what it means to you to be safe. Do you equate safety with feeling dead? That is emotional numbing, one of the symptoms of PTSD.

**Finding feelings:** Perhaps rather than seeking danger or numbness, it would be a healthier choice to seek the feelings under all that numbness, even if they are painful. You could even take two new actions: *cry* for your losses and have some *compassion* for what you have been through. The kind of crying many trauma survivors do, crying and scolding themselves at the same time (“What are you crying for. Get over it!”) is the reverse of healing. As Bill W (the founder of AA) said, “Punishment never heals. Only love heals. “ Being in pain means you need healing.

**Compassion heals:** Most of us who deal with PTSD in ourselves or our loved ones or our clients have been through pain that most people

choose to ignore and discount. That makes our lives harder. Self-pity is “Why me?” followed by drinking, drugging, watching TV and lying around, punctuated with brief attempts to “Get over it! Why aren’t I over it yet? What’s wrong with me?” Compassion says, “I am a human being and trauma affects me. What I have been through was painful and I need to respect that, to be kind to myself, and learn to take care of myself in healthy ways. “ That empowers you to seek new tools.

Compassion for others is also very empowering and good practice in looking outside your own head and your own reactions. When someone annoys you, try thinking, “This person is doing his or her very best at this moment. Isn’t it sad that it is so irritating? Must be having a bad day.” Thoughts like that develop a new path in your brain. You might also realize an old 12 step slogan: *you spot it, you got it*, and see that maybe you do that, whatever it is, too.

**Change the way you dress:** If the way you dress is rigidly focused on survivor issues, a combat vet who always wears camouflage, a survivor of spouse abuse who wears male-bashing T-shirts, an incest survivor in skin tight clothes, (unconsciously relaying the message that my value is sexual) try dressing differently. Awareness of how your clothing affects others and your own self-concept is important. If you feel invisible without your usual clothes, writing about that might give you insight into your need for recognition, which is natural and normal, and perhaps point you in a new direction for achieving it.

**Read something** you wouldn’t ordinarily read.

**Take peaceful time** for yourself every day and take some action that leaves you feeling human. It might be taking a warm bath. If you were molested in the bathtub, that might not work, or it might convince you it is now safe to bathe. Make sure you lock your doors first. Play with the bubbles. You might sit in the sun and do nothing, listen to soft music and sway your body gently, do slow stretches, work with plants. You get the idea.

Scientific studies show **writing** is a great tool for healing. In the book *Opening Up* James Pennybacker reports that writing your deepest thoughts and feelings for fifteen minutes a day for four days had a very healing effect on people’s lives even though in the short term it was quite painful. This was especially effective when the people wrote about past traumas. No one

has to read what you write. It may also take more than four days. It took Bob three years to write *Chickenhawk*, but it did help him heal. I personally find that writing about incidents helps me see patterns. For some reason when I see something as a pattern instead of bad, it is easier for me to accept that I might be doing it, and so be willing to change. I'm not so defensive. Bad feelings seem to run down my arm and out my pen when I write. *The Way of The Journal* by Kathleen Adams, is a book of writing exercises for people with PTSD. Aphrodite Matsakis' *I Can't Get Over It* has suggestions for writing about trauma as does her great new book *Trust After Trauma*.

**Stretch:** Muscular tension is a part of the hyperarousal common among trauma survivors. Every time you stretch, you release some of this tension and lower your arousal. Yoga helps with this. One stretch at a time, you can begin to let go.

I have never been able to make big instant changes, but one small action—stretching, journal writing, walking in the woods—at a time, I am capable of changing.

**Relaxation** is another tool many survivors use, part of both meditation and yoga. If you can't sit still long enough to meditate, you could start with stretching gently at home or in a yoga class. Meditation is not really effective if you were constantly abused as a child because being alone in your own mind can be painful. I think that explains the 12 step slogan "The mind is a dangerous place: don't go there alone." Yoga with a trauma-trained teacher is the preferred choice for you.

I just met a Vietnam vet who uses Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living* to help others deal with stress. No one does it perfectly, either. The point is not bliss, but acceptance.

The book, *Wherever You Go There You Are*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn has helped Bob and me. There is another book called *Walking Meditation* by Thich Nhat Hanh, and one called *The Serpent and the Wave: A Guide to Movement Meditation* by Jalaja Bonheim if you can't (yet) sit still.

As you stretch or meditate or move, work at increasing your awareness of your breath, your body, the length of your muscles, the small twinges here and there, the light in the room, the connection between yourself and everything else. Even if you just start with the numb butt you may be developing from contact with the floor, it is still a connection, a beginning,

and a different awareness, one you can develop. Most people struggle to meditate. That is normal. Shoygal Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, calls the thoughts that zip around in your head “risings.” He says it is fun to observe your risings and then go back to the breath. I certainly get a laugh out of mine!

**Art:** The creation of something that has meaning for you out of your traumatic experiences is one of the oldest forms of letting go there is. Art expresses and releases pain and makes new connections with the world. When you create, you are here and now, not inside your own head going around and around, alert/numb/alert/numb.

Releasing feelings through creativity increases the level of functioning in those parts of your brain and draws the focus away from the danger/survival part. Don't worry. Your brain still has the danger/survival capacity. It just won't rule everything.

**Exercise** also connects you to the world in a healing way. It releases stress, too, a good thing to add to your life if PTSD is causing you a lot of disruption. Any regular exercise is good. I prefer walking, myself, because it helps me focus my thinking and I'm not likely to injure myself even if I overdo it. My 86 year old mother belongs to a health club and does water aerobics three times a week.

**Play:** Make yourself into a child again and swing on a swing or slide down a slide. If childhood wasn't safe, grant yourself some time to be a kid. Get yourself a Barbie Doll or GI Joe, Buzz Lightyear or Raggedy Ann or Andy. You may feel silly, but silliness and hypervigilance are probably incompatible.

**Acts of kindness:** Doing something kind for someone else is another tool survivors use, an action rather than a reaction. It can be as simple as a smile, as saying hello to someone. You don't have to try to do magnificent things. Start small.

One of the more amusing results of scientific research has been the astonishing discovery that altruism has actual quantifiable health benefits! People who do things for others live longer healthier lives. I think it takes them out of their own troubles, empowers them, and promotes well-being. It is worth trying.

*Every change for the better starts with some small action.* When I remember all the years when I couldn't change at all, the tiniest step can make me feel empowered. Start small, but start.

As I try to make clear in every newsletter, we are all different, and different things work for different people. Searching for your path to healing is sometimes a lonely frightening job. I hope the Gazette is a companion on the path, helping you with suggestions, guidelines, new ideas, old ideas, fun ideas.

**Note:** Since this article was written, various therapies for releasing the kind of stress trauma survivors hold in their bodies have been developed. Pat Ogden ([sensorimotorpsychotherapy.org](http://sensorimotorpsychotherapy.org)) and Babette Rothschild ([somatictraumatherapy.com](http://somatictraumatherapy.com)) and Peter Levine ([traumahealing.org](http://traumahealing.org)) are three of the pioneers in the field.

People have also had tremendous relief of symptoms through Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing ([www.emdr.com](http://www.emdr.com)) and Traumatic Incident Reduction ([www.tir.org](http://www.tir.org)). The method of tapping on specific points and meridians of your body, developed by Roger Callahan ([tfttapping.com](http://tfttapping.com)) has been helpful to some. Other forms of tapping include Tapas Accupressure Technique (TAT) ([tatlife.com](http://tatlife.com)). Check them out and see if any of them seems worth trying.

## 10 things you can do today for yourself: writing

1. Write for 15 minutes about your deepest thoughts and feelings.

Although this can be painful, according to James Pennybacker in *Opening Up*, people who do this even if they don't share it with anyone eventually feel a great sense of relief. It is most effective if it is a traumatic event from the past that still bothers you.

2. Write a gratitude list:

Start with your arms and legs if you have them. Being alive, having a home, trees, birds, bugs. you can list things you take for granted but would find difficult to live without. Sometimes when someone is grumpy, I write that I am grateful that I am not that grumpy person. I find this is a good wakeup

and reality check. We all have a tendency to take things for granted, from the weather to our health. Gratitude lists increase our awareness of the good in our lives.

3. List the things you did well today.

Start with “got up and went to the bathroom.” Another reality check. Can I care for basic bodily functions? Some people can’t. Whatever else you do is gravy. List every- thing and pat yourself on the back for all of it.

4. Write that list of things you might like to do.

Write, walk, run, read, dance, sing, start a garden, eat French food?

5. Write out the steps of the HEALS technique on a card you can carry with you.

Use it when you start to get upset.

6. Write a list of people who you admired, who helped you, or were kind to you. Do it in 10 year blocks starting in infancy.

Sometimes they were few and far between but think of smiles, someone being helpful, your current therapist, the person who held the door or the bus for you.

7. Write an affirmation.

I can recover. I deserve to recover. I can learn new skills.

Here is one I wrote for people with PTSD

### **Affirmation for People with PTSD**

I’m \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m \_\_\_\_ years old.

I am in a safe place in \_\_\_\_\_.

I live with \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ cares about me.

I can cry and be scared and everyone will still care for me.

I need to have these feelings so I can let them go.

8. Write a want ad for a higher power who can help you heal.

What would you need and want that higher power to be and to do for you? Then you can act as if it existed.

### **Prayer for People with PTSD**

Higher Power,

I know that it's not within the harmony of the universe that I be healed from the trauma of remembering \_\_\_\_\_ without pain.

Help me through the pain. Surround me with the golden light of healing, fill me with the white light of peace and love. Help me to bear the pain as I go through these memories. Help me to cry. Help me to remember. Help me to love myself no matter what happened to me or what I did to survive. Amen.

9. Write a list of all the excuses you use to convince yourself that something you do doesn't count

We often rationalize and excuse our behavior. Awareness and laughing at ourselves can lead to changing and healing.

10. Write a letter to yourself from someone who harmed you in which they say everything you ever wanted to hear them say.

It's a healing experience.

## Reader's Write:

### A kinder way to see myself:

Julie writes;

Every issue has little pearls within and I'm sure that everyone who reads it sees different pearls, depending on where they are in their recovery process, what they've been through and the mood they are in when they read it. Like one of your readers noted, it's best read over several times.

Often I read it when I'm feeling isolated or lonely. It helps me to know that I'm not alone. Other people actually know how this feels...

It sounds like you are looking for coping tips. When I realized that I immediately thought of what you wrote to me when I first wrote you—a couple years ago now. I had told you a little about my history: the fact that I was in an abusive relationship and was so buried in denial and numbness that I had just learned I had psychogenic amnesia about the abuse. I could

only remember bits and pieces. That's still the case, and I've come to the conclusion that maybe I'm not remembering because I wouldn't be able to handle it yet...

Anyway, when I wrote you , I sent an excerpt from my journal and you responded to what I wrote with the following.. (see below)

Maybe this would help somebody. It sure helped me get a better perspective on things. When I slip back into that old way of thinking, which happens from time to time when something triggers those old responses, I get this out and read it again. And again. And again, until I can start to see the healthier, "more polite" way to handle the feelings and see myself.

How I feel now:	A kinder way to see myself:	What I hope to become:
defective	ineffective	effective
disordered	out of order	in order
blemished	roughed up by life	green and growing again
deficient	without resources	resourceful
faulty	human	more human
inadequate	unsupported	adequate and supportive
impaired	unsupported	repaired, stronger at the broken places
impure	unprotected	purely Julie
damaged	roughed up by life	whole
degraded	invaded	a person who has refunded the shame to the perpetrator
ruined	injured	a recovering person
violated	not my fault	recovering myself
fucked up	been fucked over	fucking recovering

# Compassion Power

## Mission Statement

“Compassion Workshops are scientifically sound educational-therapeutic programs based on the psychological principle of incompatible response: the human brain cannot do incompatible behaviors at the same time. When experiencing compassion for self and others we cannot do harm to ourselves or to anyone else. We cannot fail to act in our best interests.”

Steven Stosny, PhD's 12 week program on compassion has produced batterers who are 87% violence free after a year by victim report. He gives a series of workshops including:

- The Core Value Workshop

Going beyond anger management and anger control to teach compassion as an antidote to emotional abuse, verbal abuse, and domestic violence.

- For professionals & educators

Power Love

Changing Abusers

Resentment-Free Workplace

These also teach:

- How to prevent resentment from turning into emotional abuse.
- How to identify abuse and change abusive behavior.
- How to determine if change is permanent.
- How to stop resentment from affecting your children.
- Actions to take if you are a resentful or angry partner.

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## Other Ways: The Mozart Effect

Listening to classical music is known to have an effect on people's health, their ability to learn, their mood, the quality of their sleep, and so forth.

In the latest issue (January/ February 1998) of the magazine *Natural Health*, an excerpt from the book, *The Mozart Effect*, by Don Campbell, explained how Gerard Depardieu, the French actor "from a background of family difficulties, educational failures and personal sorrows," was healed and began to be able to speak instead of stutter through listening to Mozart for two hours a day. This therapy, prescribed by a French doctor named Tomatis, also improved his appetite, his sleep, and his energy levels. Depardieu is quoted as saying "I could not complete any of my sentences. He [Dr. Tomatis] helped give continuity to my thoughts, and he gave me the power to synthesize and understand what I was thinking."

Another quote from the article: "Half an hour of music provides the same effect as 10 milligrams of valium." This works even if you are not conscious. Auditory pathways still transmit sound to the brain even under anesthetic. Trauma survivors know that. Many are continually jerked awake by slight sounds. The Mozart effect is good news, particularly for those who have difficulties with trust. It is something you can do—without a therapist or group support—at home in private. It can even be done in public using earphones. Listening to Mozart's Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major for 10 minutes apparently improves your ability to learn things. Since difficulty concentrating is one of the symptoms of PTSD and often interferes with the effectiveness of therapy because it can be so hard to focus on what is going on, I think it would be a wonderful idea for therapists to play Mozart in the waiting room. Even if they don't, you can!

### **Note:**

There are varying reports about the Mozart Effect. Some scientists say it just puts you in a good mood so you do better on tests. As far as that's concerned, I think it can't hurt and may help with PTSD symptoms.