

RECLAIM HOPE

*Empowering Your Life Through
Five Strategies*



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Second Edition.

I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.

-Carl Jung-

Reclaim Hope. Defend Innocence.

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About the Yunique Foundation

We inspire hope in women who were sexually abused as children or adolescents by hosting them at a retreat where they are uplifted by each other and learn skills that can help them find individual healing.

We educate parents and empower them to protect their children from sexual abuse while leading a public dialogue to bring the epidemic of abuse to light.

The Yunique Foundation (TYF) was established as a nonprofit organization in December 2014 in Lehi, Utah. As a public charity, TYF is made possible through the kindness and generosity of many wonderful donors, especially Derek and Shelaine Maxfield who lead with vision and funding to make our goals attainable.

About the Authors

This book is the compilation of many individuals' efforts, both clinical and non-clinical. The Clinical Director of The Yunique Foundation, Gordon Bruin, MA, CMHC, was the lead author. Special thanks to him and his team for incorporating many years of diverse clinical experience into this book.

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Reclaim Hope

Introduction: You Are a Survivor

*I am not afraid of storms
for I am learning how to sail my ship.*
-Louise May Alcott-

In the 15th century a mighty Japanese shogun warrior broke his favorite tea bowl and decided to send it to China for repair. Instead of returning as the lovely bowl he had known, it returned with ugly metal staples. It was usable, but the shogun was disappointed. He asked a Japanese craftsman to come up with a more beautiful solution, one that would add to the beauty of the tea bowl. The craftsman tried something new and mended the cracks with a lacquer resin mixed with gold. When the shogun warrior received the bowl the second time, streaks of gold ran through it where the cracks had been before. He thought the bowl looked even better than it had before it was broken. This method of repair became known as *kintsugi*.

Kintsugi (pronounced kent-soo-ghee) is the Japanese philosophy of recognizing beauty in broken things. *Kintsugi* speaks of breakage and repair becoming part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise or hide. When you look at your life, you may notice places that are broken. Many of these broken pieces are the result of someone else's actions and *are not your fault*. Just as the shogun's tea bowl became more beautiful and valued through repair, your healing will only enhance your inherent value.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five children are sexually abused before the age of 18. This book is written for you, one of the many people affected by this societal plague. You are not alone in your experience and The Younique Foundation was established to help survivors of childhood sexual abuse, like you. We use that word purposefully: survivor. You are still here – you survived. And, if you're reading this book, then you're ready to move from surviving to thriving. You can live a positive, productive, and empowered life. It is not only possible, but probable.

In this book we will help you better understand the impact of the trauma caused by your sexual abuse and introduce you to powerful, proven, and effective strategies that have helped many other survivors start to feel, to heal, and to move forward in life.

This is Your Experience

At the outset it's important to recognize that your experience is *your* experience. No one has the right to invalidate it, minimize it, or justify it away. The information in this book is meant to be a powerful personal guide to help you acknowledge the truth about your past, discover your voice, and heal from the debilitating experience of sexual abuse.

Please keep in mind as you read that certain things may trigger you. A “trigger” is anything that reminds you of traumatic events from the past that lead to a mental, physical, or emotional reaction in the present moment. If this happens, please put the book down and come back to it when you feel ready.

Throughout the book you'll notice us frequently reference the idea of you becoming a Mindful Warrior. We believe this idea has powerful meaning as it relates to healing from past sexual trauma. At first glance the term Mindful Warrior doesn't make much sense. In fact, the two words appear to have contrasting meanings. A warrior is someone who is strong and unrelenting in her pursuit of ultimate victory, whereas being mindful means a person is thoughtful and methodical about what is happening and even at peace with her current battle. When these two concepts are combined, you becomes a Mindful Warrior who doesn't give up easily, who is tough and strong, yet thoughtful and methodical.

A Mindful Warrior is committed to acknowledging the truth and is willing to do what it takes to heal. A Mindful Warrior uses her knowledge and wisdom to proactively choose where to fight and where

A really strong woman accepts the war she went through and is ennobled by her scars.

-Carly Simon-

to put her energy. A Mindful Warrior knows that in order to win the battle of her trauma recovery, she must learn how and when to walk away from the internal fight in which she may have been participating. A Mindful Warrior understands it is useless to keep fighting certain battles that cannot be won. Instead she fights the worthwhile battles by using the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope. We are

committed to helping you become a Mindful Warrior.

What's in This Book

This book is a combination of strategies, practical applications, and narrative stories presented in six main sections. First we'll introduce you to how our brain responds to trauma. We'll help you understand the basic workings of the brain, which has led to many "ah-ha moments" for other survivors. We'll then teach you the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope that will help you on your path to healing. The five strategies are:

- Awareness
- Acknowledgement
- Power Through Surrender
- Mindfulness
- Faith

In the clinical profession, these evidence-based strategies are referred to as "best practices." To be considered a best practice a particular principle, philosophy, or method has to pass the test of time and the scrutiny of research. Drawing on years of clinical experience, we

are confident that we are introducing you to some of the best material available. With that in mind, no single best practice works for everyone, so don't worry if one practice doesn't work for you. Simply try a different one.

The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope aren't necessarily meant to be used in order. At times you'll need one more than another, or need to change the order in which you utilize them, but they all work together.

We've set a narrative example in this book around a fictional childhood sexual abuse survivor named Jenny. Her story is based on common experiences most survivors have. As you read you may see similarities between yourself and Jenny. Our hope is that you'll see the content of this book come to life through Jenny, and she'll provide an example of what the healing journey may look like for you. In addition, we have an Appendix and Resources at the end of the book that can help you continue your healing journey.



This book is powerful because it combines the best concepts and time-tested theories from across the clinical profession about healing from sexual abuse and creating lifelong change. We are amazed by the wealth of information and understanding that has developed over the past ten

When one door closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.

-Helen Keller-

to fifteen years. We are confident these methods are effective and can make a difference.

This is a Healing Journey

Though this book is a tool to help in your healing, we also encourage those who have been sexually abused to seek therapeutic help from licensed mental health professionals. But if you are not ready to take that step, the information in this book can still be beneficial.

Keep in mind as you go through this book that you are on a healing *journey*. It will be a path that you follow step by step, gaining knowledge as you go, leading you to peace and your ability to reclaim hope. We consider it a privilege to offer our help in your healing journey. It takes courage to face the challenging issues of your past, and we admire you for your efforts to take charge of your own healing process. As a survivor, you are an individual worthy of honor and respect.

Learning how all of this fits together will help you take control of your future decisions and choices. Facing past trauma is challenging, but it's critical that you do so in order for healing to take place.

Accepting responsibility for your healing journey can be difficult. *The abuse was not your fault*. However, your healing journey is *your* responsibility. Mental health is about learning to accept reality and then doing whatever is necessary to manage it. This is not an easy thing for any of us to do, but the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope provide a road map to follow and a way to face life with confidence, courage, and hope.

Think again about the shogun warrior. His favorite tea bowl was broken, but after it was repaired it became even more precious to him than it had been before. We do not celebrate the fact that you were abused, but we absolutely celebrate the wonderful person you have become and will become as you go on your healing journey, creating your real life version of *kintsugi*.

Reclaim Hope

Trauma and the Brain: Understanding How Your Brain Works

*If you better understand how your mind works,
you can better navigate through a world
of increasingly subtle manipulation.*

-Richard Brodie-

Jenny was the middle child in a family of three kids. She grew up in a suburb and loved things like riding her bike around the neighborhood and playing with dolls. Tragically, when she was seven years old, a family friend molested her. For the next few years Jenny was consistently molested by this same family friend.

Jenny learned how to disappear when she was being abused. She described this as coming out of her body or floating above it, as if the abuse were happening to another girl. By pushing the abuse out of her mind, she found a way to have what she thought was a normal childhood.



As Jenny got older she didn't think the sexual abuse had impacted her that much. But during her adolescent years, she began to notice her contempt for any boy who showed her attention. She felt uncomfortable when a boy tried to get close to her and would push him away. The memory of her abuse kept coming back and made her feel bad about herself. Somehow she felt she was to blame, even though she wasn't. She convinced herself that she could have prevented it.

She wondered how any boy could like her when she felt like she was such a bad person. Jenny viewed herself as if she were two different people. One part of her really wanted to get close to boys; the other part wanted to stay far away from them.

She had been in a number of different relationships throughout the years, none of which lasted for more than a couple of months. She was frustrated and tired and wanted to find some answers. Jenny had deep desires to settle down, get married, and raise a family. But unless she was able to work through her trauma, she felt it wasn't going to happen. These feelings continued into her adult life when, in her mid-thirties, she finally sought professional help.

Fortunately, Jenny found the answers she was looking for when she learned about how early sexual trauma affects the development of the human brain, specifically a concept called *the two-part brain model*. After gaining a better understanding of how her brain worked, she was introduced to the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope, which helped her heal from the past trauma.

The Two-Part Brain Model

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as *an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives.*

Sexual abuse trauma occurs when a person violates your personal space without your consent or permission. It's an event that has a tendency to destroy trust, not only in the individual who violated the trust but also in the world at large. It makes the world seem like an unsafe place.

Although information about the science of the brain is somewhat technical and clinical, we've learned that if a survivor like Jenny understands what is happening within her brain and body, she can more effectively apply the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope and the techniques that accompany them. Survivors often describe this part of the book as critical in helping them have "ah-ha moments." Knowing why things happen can be validating and empowering. Take your time in this section and read it multiple times if needed.

Most people like to think of themselves as having one brain which is the control center for all thoughts and activities. Brain researchers describe the brain differently. They say that we actually have three separate

parts of our brain that try to work together in unison to produce a positive and healthy life.

John Medina, a molecular developmental biologist and brain researcher, states in his book *Brain Rules* that our brain has three distinct parts with three distinct functions. He calls these parts the Human brain (neocortex), the Mammalian brain (limbic), and the Lizard brain (reptilian). Neuroscientists generally agree that the three-part brain is the control center for all feelings, emotions, and behaviors, both conscious and subconscious.



For our purposes, we're going to focus on just two parts of the brain: 1) The limbic system, and 2) The neocortex, specifically the front part of the neocortex, the prefrontal cortex. (The reptilian brain, though it has the important job of basic functions like breathing and heart pumping, will not be part of this discussion.)

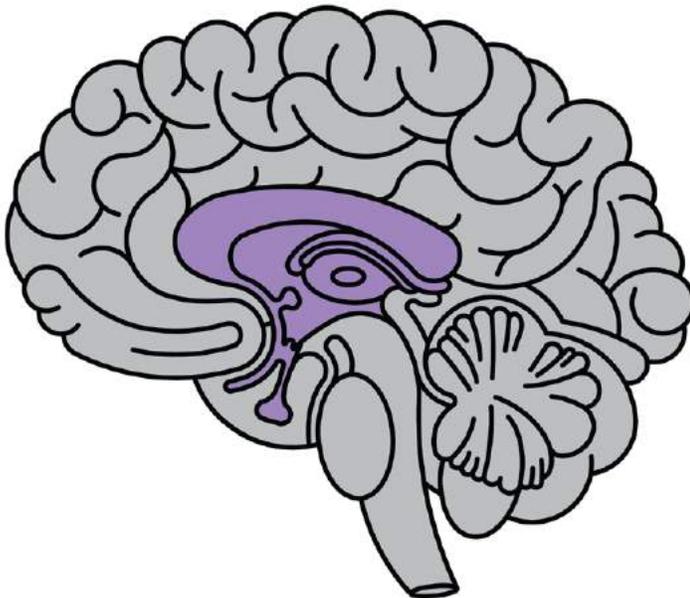
In simple terms, these two parts of the brain work in tandem and interact with each other constantly. They are both vital for our day-to-day functioning and welfare. We cannot fully live without either one of them. They are both necessary, but unless we understand their functions and

how they operate, we can find ourselves caught in self-defeating behaviors, which are things we do, think, or say that cause harm to us or others.

The Limbic System

The limbic system, or “primitive brain” as some call it, is where our instinctual drives originate and where our pleasure centers are located. These pleasure centers are extremely powerful in driving our behaviors and can easily lead to addictive, compulsive, or self-defeating behaviors unless they’re understood and managed. The limbic system has three simple but powerful directives:

1. Survive
2. Avoid pain
3. Seek pleasure



The thalamus, in the limbic system, is the gathering place for sensory input. When we see something with our eyes, for example, that information goes to the thalamus, which then decides if it’s a survival situation. For many people, most of that sensory information is weeded

The past has no power over the present moment.

-Eckhart Tolle-

out and never even comes to their awareness. Think about driving a car. You aren't aware of every color, object, person, etc. that surrounds you. If the car in front of you brakes suddenly, however, you become hyper-aware. Those red brake lights trigger the limbic system. Your heart starts beating faster and adrenaline starts pumping, preparing you for a survival situation.

A traumatized brain, however, can easily misinterpret something as a survival situation when, in reality, it's not. In other words, a harmless situation can remind you of past trauma and trigger survival responses and behaviors.

Jenny's normal relationships with her boyfriends as a teenager triggered a survival response as if she were in danger because of the abuse in her past. When she would get close to them, alarms would go off within her limbic system that would associate any intimate activity, including healthy activity, with danger. This continued into her adult years. She was unable to stay in a relationship for more than a couple of months because her limbic system would subconsciously drive her to get away from the perceived danger.

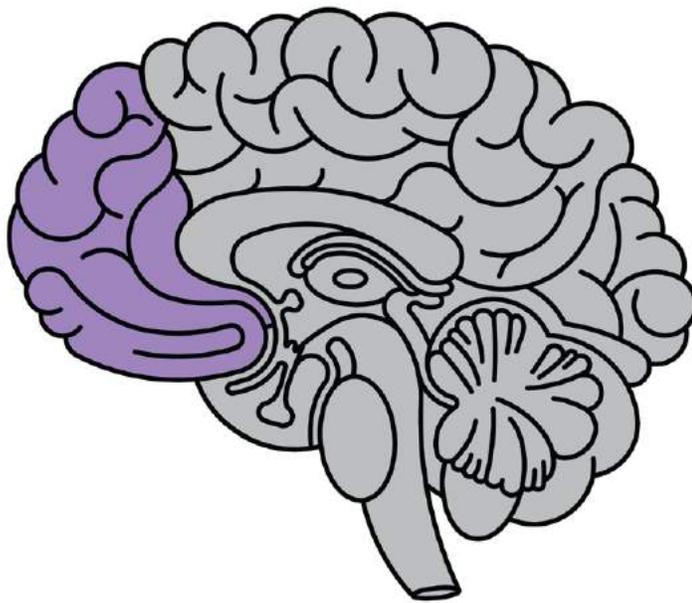
The limbic system is the part of the brain where survival instincts come from, and it's also *where traumatic memories are stored*. It's the part of the brain where fear lives and thrives. Some fear isn't a bad thing. In fact, without being able to feel fear we wouldn't be able to survive very long. However, when trauma occurs early in life, and sexual abuse trauma in particular, this part of the brain can become wired to view the entire world through the lens of fear, even things you don't need to be afraid of.

Deep in the limbic system is another area called the amygdala. Its job is to make sure we survive. It's the place where our fight, flight, and

freeze instincts are found. The amygdala's job within the limbic system is to respond to the world and keep us alive. But if we don't direct it down the right paths, it can dominate our life. We also know that if the limbic system is constantly unrestrained, it can rule our lives without us fully understanding what's going on or why we may feel depressed or anxious all the time.

The Prefrontal Cortex

The prefrontal cortex, or “rational brain,” is the moral, logical part of the brain that sits above the limbic system. It's located in the very front of the brain, just behind the forehead. This part of the brain is in charge of abstract thinking, thought analysis, and regulating behavior. It's the braking system that stops us from acting out on all of the cravings or compulsions that originate from the limbic system.



■ Prefrontal Cortex

Neuroscience now shows us that when an individual decides not to follow through on an intention, the prefrontal cortex becomes active. This happens because the prefrontal cortex objectively observes the intention and helps us to move in a different direction, if appropriate.

This area of the brain also governs social control such as suppressing emotional or sexual urges. It's where our sense of right and wrong comes from. It also mediates between conflicting thoughts and predicts the probable outcome of actions or events. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for deciding on actions. Many refer to it as "the higher brain" or "the conductor." This is where qualities like consciousness, intelligence, and personality originate. However, this part of the brain is easily manipulated by the limbic system.

Getting the Two-Part Brain to Work Together

The truth about childhood is stored up in our body and lives in the depth of our soul. Our intellect can be deceived, our feelings can be numbed and manipulated, our perceptions shamed and confused, our bodies tricked with medication. But our soul never forgets. And because we are one, one whole soul in one body, someday our body will present its bill.

-Alice Miller-

An iceberg is a good metaphor for the two-part brain model: 85 to 90 percent of an iceberg is underneath the surface of the water. We don't see it with our eyes, yet we know it's there, out of sight. This submerged part of an iceberg can be likened to the limbic system. In fact, many neuroscientists believe that 85 to 90 percent of our behavior is automatically driven from this deeper, subconscious part of the brain, mostly outside of our awareness.

The 10 to 15 percent of the iceberg above the water represents the conscious part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex. This part of the brain is responsible for judgement. To heal from past trauma, it's critical for this part of the brain to stay active.

In order for Jenny to change, when her relationships progressed toward more intimacy, her prefrontal cortex needed to stay active so she could *consciously* recognize that she wasn't in danger when she hugged her boyfriend or held his hand. Her limbic system was sending survival triggers that she was in danger, but her prefrontal cortex could consciously acknowledge she was safe. Once she learned to do this effectively (with help from the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope), her relationship could progress into a more meaningful place.

Some people's lives seem to flow in a narrative; mine had many stops and starts. That's what trauma does. It interrupts the plot. You can't process it because it doesn't fit with what came before or what comes afterward.

-Jessica Stern-

The core issue in restoring trauma survivors to healthy living is to create a balance between their prefrontal cortex and their limbic system. With proper training the two-part brain can become integrated. Without training the limbic system can overpower and override the prefrontal cortex (the rational brain).

You can “white knuckle” it for a period of time through sheer willpower, but when the limbic system interprets certain circumstances as a threat to survival or well-being, it becomes more anxious and desperate. Learning to manage these feelings in a healthy way is what the healing journey is all about.

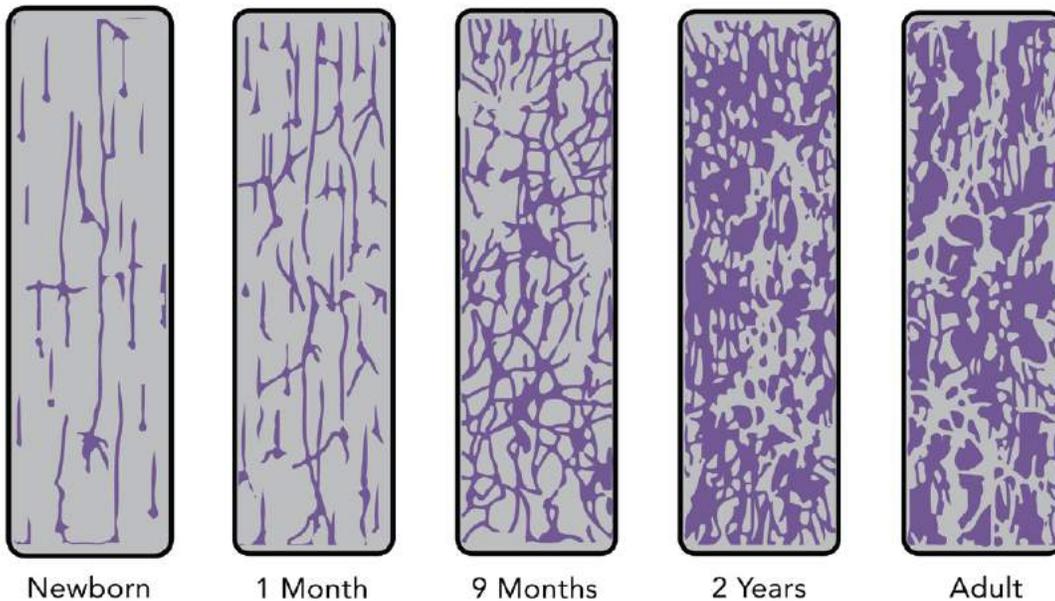
Remember how Jenny felt like she was two different people? There was part of her that wanted to be in a relationship (the prefrontal cortex), but the other part associated the relationship with trauma (the limbic system) and, therefore, thought it was dangerous.

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt provided a good analogy to describe the two-part brain using a child riding an elephant. The child represents the prefrontal cortex and the elephant represents the limbic

system. Although the elephant is much bigger and appears more powerful than the little child, the child can train and direct the elephant. When the child and elephant trust each other, they become a powerful team.

The process is the same for survivors of trauma. As the prefrontal cortex becomes more familiar with the limbic system, trust can be built between the two parts of the brain and healing expedited. All of the suggestions in this book, and the assignments in the accompanying workbook, are designed to strengthen the prefrontal cortex.

If the brain experiences trauma as it is developing, the limbic system remembers it. Our current understanding of brain development teaches us that the limbic system develops long before the prefrontal cortex does. This makes sense, as it is the limbic system's job to keep us alive. In addition, memories, particularly traumatic memories, are stored for future use to keep us out of danger.



Trauma and the Brain

Over the past twenty years, significant advances have been made that help us realize the effect that childhood trauma has on an individual. Much of this is thanks to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

Study, one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood trauma and well-being later in life. This study was a collaborative effort between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego.

This study followed more than 17,000 individuals for over ten years. Members of this study underwent a comprehensive physical examination and provided detailed information about their childhood experience of abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction.

The ACE Study clearly shows that certain childhood experiences increase factors leading to illness, poor quality of life, and early death. The main result of the study showed that there is a correlation between people's early childhood experiences (including sexual abuse trauma) and how well they function mentally and physically.

Each child is born with approximately 100 billion brain cells. At birth these brain cells are not fully wired to communicate with each other. There is a flurry of cellular development during the first couple of years in life. This development continues through childhood and adolescence and even into early adulthood.

Starting in infancy the brain is in an intense learning phase as it experiences the world. If certain developmental needs are not met, the brain gets wired not to trust certain things and does what it can to survive. In order for a child's or teen's brain to develop in a healthy manner, certain developmental needs must be consistently provided, needs like:

- Love
- Safety
- Continual nurturing
- Healthy touch

If a child's or teen's environment does not consistently provide these developmental needs it can lead to improper brain development. If the world is an unsafe place for a child or teen, then their normal development can get stuck.

If sexual abuse trauma is experienced during these child and teen years, the brain can be hindered in its development. If, instead of safety and nurturing, a child or teen experiences the violence of sexual trauma, then the brain can get stuck in perpetual survival mode and see the world as an unsafe place. This is especially true when the abuser of the trauma was someone that should have been trustworthy. The misuse of power that occurs when an adult abuses a child can leave the survivor stuck in a state of fear.

When we do not feel safe, our brain, and the limbic system in particular, will drive us toward things that can provide that feeling of safety. Often that leads us to self-defeating behaviors or negative coping mechanisms (like addiction), which gives the limbic system a sense of temporary safety or well-being. Unfortunately, the limbic system cannot distinguish between unhealthy and healthy behaviors as long as the need for survival is being met.

It's important to understand that the limbic system can't tell the difference between a past event, a present one, or a future one. To the limbic system the memory of the abuse can be just as traumatic and real as the experience itself. Protecting yourself becomes all that matters.

Although we use verbal language to engage the healing process, it's essential to understand that the limbic system doesn't have the ability to logically evaluate and respond to orders and demands. That's why telling yourself or someone else to forget the past and move on or to stop feeling a certain way is no more effective than telling a two-year-old to share his or her favorite toy and be happy about it. It's not an easy thing to do.

The best way to approach and respond to the limbic system is to become more educated about it, understand how it works, and why it does what it does. Jenny came to realize that her knowledge of the brain was essential to her healing.

Identifying IT

Something that has been helpful in the recovery process for those who struggle with sexual abuse trauma is to become more aware of and accept what could be called your trauma voice. The *trauma voice* is any thought or feeling related to past abuse issues. When the triggering thought is recognized and the limbic system responds, simply state, “Oh there IT (capital I, capital T) is.” This concept was developed by Jack Trimpey, who used this phrasing to help addicts understand the two-part brain.

The trauma voice has been very successful up until now in making you believe that IT is you. IT can do this because IT has the capacity to speak in the first person. IT uses the pronoun “I” when it talks. With increased awareness you’ll be able to recognize this voice, acknowledge IT, and identify IT by saying, “There IT is.” Instead of saying, “I feel really sick, scared, and anxious,” you can change the dialogue in your head and say, “IT is responding to the environment, but I really am safe right now.”

The limbic system may signal you are sick, scared, and anxious. The prefrontal cortex acknowledges IT, but rationally deducts that you are safe right now.

Survival mode is supposed to be a phase that helps save your life.

It is not meant to be how you live.

-Michele Rosenthal-

This idea is empowering because it finally explains what has been going on in your head and why you may respond negatively when certain memories surface. By labeling IT you're able to differentiate between your limbic system and your prefrontal cortex, allowing you to recognize what is happening and what needs to be changed. The important thing to remember is that *it's not your fault* that you feel the way you do. Your limbic system is just doing its job.

This is exactly what happened with Jenny. She learned to recognize her limbic system and, in so doing, gained control to make successful choices as she used the strategies.

Coping and Healing

Many recovery programs spend time addressing and dealing with child or teen developmental needs even though individuals are now adults. The traumatized brain has become stuck – locked in a fear-like state always on the alert for the next possible form of abuse. The limbic system learns to believe things that aren't necessarily healthy. Its job is simply to keep you alive, and it does that by avoiding any situation that is painful and replacing that pain with pleasure.

Some who were sexually abused as children were given alcohol or drugs by their abuser and told that the substance would help them forget. Although not all survivors turn to addictive substances, all must find a way to cope in order to survive. Often these coping behaviors become compulsive and self-defeating or equally painful.

Even healthy coping behaviors are not the end goal. Coping is not healing. It's a necessary and important part of the healing journey though, since we must cope until we are in a place to learn how to heal. Don't become overly critical of your coping behaviors, even those that are self-defeating. You have done what was necessary to survive. With that

said, it's important to recognize that coping behaviors must be set aside for long-term healing. Self-defeating behaviors can make the healing journey more arduous.

Dr. Lisa Najavits states, "All major research indicates that when people are given the tools to cope with trauma and addiction, they improve, often in quite short time-frames." We'll teach you how to strengthen the higher-functioning prefrontal cortex and how to manage the lower-functioning limbic system. That's what the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope are all about.

Key Concepts in this Chapter

- The Two-Part brain consists of *the limbic system* (the subconscious, "primitive" brain) and *the prefrontal cortex* (the conscious, "rational" brain).
- Childhood trauma affects your brain and throws your limbic system into overdrive, causing you to have triggering experiences even when you aren't in imminent danger.
- Your prefrontal cortex and your limbic system can learn to work together with the prefrontal cortex making the decisions like a child guiding an elephant.
- You have the power to heal and you can do it.
- The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope will give you the ability to take control of your healing journey, strengthen your prefrontal cortex, and become more aware of your limbic system.

Strategy 1

Awareness: Be Present

*Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery.
Today is a gift. That's why we call it the present.*

-A.A. Milne-

At the grocery store, walking down the aisle, Jenny suddenly saw an individual that reminded her of her abuser. Her limbic system sent an immediate alarm, signaling that she was in danger. Her limbic system couldn't differentiate between the past and present and was just doing its job by warning her of a perceived danger. Jenny felt nauseated and walked out of the store without finishing her shopping. She drove away distraught and frustrated, unable to find peace and upset with herself that she couldn't deal with her triggering memories.

The first of the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope, Awareness, could have helped her handle this situation in a different way.



What is Awareness?

Awareness is becoming more grounded in the now, in the present moment. It means learning how to develop a healthy relationship with time. Those who struggle with sexual abuse trauma may spend a significant amount of time in either the past or the future as opposed to staying focused in the present moment.

Learning to be aware of your body's feelings and sensations puts you in touch with your present self. In order to eventually manage your emotions, you must first become aware of them. Awareness training teaches you to live more fully in the present moment. To be present you have to know where you are and be aware of what is going on inside and outside of you.

Awareness gives power to your Mindful Warrior to make decisions. This cannot be done unless you use the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope to strengthen the prefrontal cortex. This strong reasoning center is the foundation for the recovery from trauma.

Dissociation

Attempting to live in the past or the future requires using your primal coping tools to manage your past sexual abuse trauma and the fear of future trauma – both made alive through your limbic system responses. These coping tools may become unhealthy, self-defeating behaviors.

When people are driven by self-defeating behaviors to cope with their sexual abuse trauma, they feed the demands of the limbic system but are blinded to the significance of the present moment. The coping behaviors employed by the limbic system cloud clear judgement and rational thinking. A person is walking around in an emotional fog searching for her next object of relief.

You may have become exceptionally skilled at using self-defeating behaviors to cope with your sexual abuse trauma. It's crucial to recognize that coping is normal. You should not beat yourself up for surviving, even if some of your survival methods are not healthy in the long term. Learning *healthy strategies* is critical to long-term healing, satisfaction, and well-being.

One of the first things you'll need to do is get grounded in your own body by engaging you in activities that can help you experience your feelings again. Trauma can be so disturbing and confusing that one of the defense mechanisms the limbic system uses is something called *dissociating*. This is where you mentally transport yourself somewhere else – anywhere else – because being where you are is too painful and disturbing.

In 1986, J.L. Titchener wrote in *Post-Traumatic Decline: A Consequence of Unresolved Destructive Drives*:

The process of dissociation is an elegant mechanism built into the human psychological system as a form of escape from dealing with traumatic experiences.

Dissociation means that certain memories are split off and isolated from the conscious mind. It is as if a part of a person's personality gets stuck and stops developing. In order to heal, these split off memories need to be integrated into a story that happened in the past but is now over.

Alexandra Katehakis wrote this about dissociation: “The problem with checking out so thoroughly is that it can leave us feeling dead inside, with little or no ability to experience our feelings in our bodies. The process for repair demands a re-association with the body, a commitment to dive into the body and feel today what we couldn't feel yesterday because it was too dangerous.”

With greater Awareness, there is greater potential to direct the course of our lives. Knowing what we feel is the first step to understanding why we feel that way. If we become more aware of what we are feeling from moment to moment, then we can learn how to manage those feelings.

Live in the Present

Awareness opens a door for us. Becoming aware of what thoughts and feelings we are having in the present is the beginning of replacing self-defeating or unhealthy behaviors with healthy behaviors.

Recently there has been a movement towards learning how to live more fully in the *now*. In reality, the *now* is only made possible because it is connected to a past and a future. Learning to live in the present doesn't dismiss the importance of the past or the future, but it does put both in perspective.

All three components of time – the past, present, and future – are necessary for you to understand your experience. Learning to have

a proper relationship with each of these components of time is important. If neither the past nor the future existed, then nothing would make sense in your life because it wouldn't be connected to anything to provide context, and it wouldn't matter what you did in any given set of circumstances. There would also be no consequences because there would be no future to be concerned about.

The time is now: the place is here. Stay in the present. You can do nothing to change the past, and the future will never come exactly as you plan or hope for.

-Dan Millman-

Being grounded in Awareness, you understand that no matter where you are in the process of recovery, today is the most important day you'll ever have. In fact, if you slow down and think about it, the present moment is the only thing you ever have.

The accompanying workbook gives several exercises to help you practice Awareness. Grounding techniques are especially powerful because they not only ground you in the present, but they also strengthen the conversation between your limbic system and your prefrontal cortex.

When you are in a moment that requires Awareness, try one of the following:

- Focus on one of your senses and name all the things that you are aware of because of that sense. For instance, if you choose hearing you can focus on each individual sound around you.
- Put a piece of candy in your mouth and focus all your attention on it. Pay attention to the way it dissolves on your tongue and try not to bite it. Slow down and notice everything about it that you possibly can.
- Choose a color and locate every single thing around you

that has that color. You can do this even while you're driving. You'll be amazed at the things that pop out at you.

The essence of Awareness is slowing down and learning how to be fully present. The workbook will expose you to exercises that can be practiced throughout your life to learn increased Awareness.

One of The Yunique Foundation employees shared the following story:

“Many years ago I had an experience that helped me understand how getting fully grounded in the present can help manage any challenge one might be facing.

“I went with a group of friends on a week-long camping trip to a lake resort. During this trip about eight of us decided to swim across the lake to the other side. As we got about halfway out into the lake one of my friends, who was not the greatest of swimmers, began to panic. He saw how far we had gone and that we had reached ‘no man's land,’ or the point of no return. It was equally far to either side of the lake and he was exhausted.

“He stated in a panicked and frantic voice, ‘I can't make it, I can't make it! I don't think I can swim anymore!’ It was a concerning moment for the rest of us. We each went into our own bit of survival mode to try to figure out how to manage the situation and best help our friend.

“Having taken some lifesaving classes, I knew the worst thing to do when approaching a panicked or drowning swimmer was to get too close to them because they would just drag you down or pull you under the water with them, which would put my life in danger. In such cases, you would have to knock the individual out in order to drag them to shore safely. I didn't really want it to get to that point, so I clearly and directly spoke to him about getting his mind off the future.

“He was overwhelmed when he looked at how far he had yet to go, and that frightened him. I got him to focus on only one stroke at a time. I said to him, ‘Focus only on my voice and listen to me. You have come a very long way, and the only way you did that was one stroke at a time. We are all here with you and are not going to leave you. All you need to do is focus on your next stroke. Do not look at the other side of the lake. Look only at me and listen to my voice.’ This calmed him down as we slowly made it safely to the other side.”

Learning how to breathe calmly and remaining in a state of relative physical relaxation, even while accessing painful and horrifying memories, is an essential tool for recovery.

-Bessel van der Kolk-

You can easily get overwhelmed by focusing too much on the future and realizing how far away you are from your ultimate goal of healing. But no matter what the task is, it becomes manageable when you focus only on the next step in front of you. The task you are doing now becomes your current destination.

Jenny and Awareness

Think back to Jenny in the grocery store. When she uses the strategy of Awareness her response is different. As her limbic system screams that she is in danger, she takes a moment to be aware of the present. She takes several deep breaths and lets them out, counting in and out with each one. She acknowledges the feelings that IT (her limbic system) is having. Her prefrontal cortex makes a conscious decision that the individual she's seeing is not her abuser. She is not in danger. Through Awareness she is able to refocus her thoughts on the present and continue shopping.



The perceived danger doesn't derail her day. She successfully finishes her shopping and leaves the grocery store feeling empowered by her ability to choose her response to normal triggers that arise in day-to-day living. She fought the battle as a Mindful Warrior.

Key Concepts in this Chapter

- Awareness is realizing that the only time something can happen is *now*. Refocus your mind on the present moment instead of the future or past.
- Spending too much time in the future or the past can lead to anxiety or depression. It can also lead to the use of negative coping mechanisms, self-defeating behaviors, and addictions.
- Grounding techniques restore balance and allow your limbic system and prefrontal cortex to talk to one another.
- Awareness puts you in a position to make a conscious

choice, allowing you to choose how you'll act and respond in any given situation.

- Becoming aware of the present moment will help you get out of crisis mode so you can move forward in a productive way.

Strategy 2

Acknowledgement: Accept Your Truth

*[Acknowledgement] doesn't mean resignation;
it means understanding that something is what it is
and that there's got to be a way through it.*

-Michael J. Fox-

In order to cope with her past, Jenny turned to addictive behaviors. She struggled with addiction for many years but refused to acknowledge it. One day a friend approached her and, in confidence, told her about an issue regarding another individual struggling with addiction. As Jenny's friend was bemoaning the individual's behavior, fear and anxiety raced through Jenny as she realized her friend might as well be talking about her. It finally hit her that she was an addict. As she examined the behaviors of her life, there was just too much behavioral evidence to

*The acknowledgement
of our weakness is the
first step in repairing
our loss.*

-Thomas Kempis-

ignore. She was using her addiction to drown out the memories of her abuse.

Acknowledging Your Truth

The second Strategy to Reclaim Hope is to Acknowledge the truth about your actions, no matter how difficult that might be. Acknowledgement consists of four major parts:

1. Acknowledgement helps you accept where you are on your healing journey. You recognize your truth and what you need to do to heal. As long as you repress the truth you are fundamentally at war with yourself. Suppressing core feelings is both psychologically taxing and physically exhausting.
2. Acknowledgement helps you know that although it isn't your fault that the abuse occurred, it is within your power to get the help you need to heal.
3. Acknowledgement allows you to courageously take a look at the past traumatic events in your life, the effect they've had on you, and know that you can change.
4. Acknowledgement is the key to behavior change. It isn't a one-time thing but an ongoing process. You have to continually Acknowledge where you are and know where you need to be.

Acknowledgement and Self-Defeating Behaviors

We know that for many survivors of sexual abuse Acknowledgement can be challenging, but to change and grow it's necessary to Acknowledge what happened in order to feel again. Acknowledgement allows the Mindful Warrior to consciously choose how to manage raw feelings.

According to SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health, only 10.4% of those who need addiction treatment receive it. This is another example of how powerful the limbic system is. Before anyone can change an addictive or self-defeating behavior, they first need to Acknowledge that it exists.

Because denial is so powerful, you could end up suffering more than necessary if you wait too long to seek help. The natural consequences of addictive and self-defeating behaviors continue to pile up until you finally break down. Because of the shame involved, you may be embarrassed to seek help. As you complete the exercises in the accompanying workbook you may be able to identify your own self-defeating or addictive behaviors that are holding you back. After you've Acknowledged them, you can then seek help.

Addiction doesn't occur in all survivors, of course, but self-defeating behaviors can all become addictive coping mechanisms over time.

Acknowledgement Through Writing

For many a great place to start when dealing with past trauma is to write in a journal. During the beginning stages of recovery some things may be too difficult to verbalize. Journaling is a safe place for you to find

out where you really are emotionally. As you write you may come across truths that you weren't previously aware of. You'll be able to explore these realizations alone before you bring them out into the open, which might be a necessary part of your healing journey. It's good to remember that language, writing, and talking belong in the prefrontal cortex. It's about as far removed as possible from the limbic system and the emotional part of the brain.

When you write about your abuse, stay grounded in the present moment through Awareness. Note the current date and time and indicate that you are writing about an event that happened in the past. This will help you clearly distinguish between the past and the present.



As you begin the process of unlocking and addressing memories, it may be beneficial for you to write as if no one will ever read it. You may notice as you begin to write that a part of you wants to restrict what you put down on paper. We call this your social editor.

Your social editor is afraid of what others might think about what you've written. It's afraid of judgement or criticism. If you think someone else will read your story, your social editor may jump in and try to censor

what you're writing. If you feel comfortable with others reading what you're writing, this may not be a problem for you. But if you sense your social editor jumping in and saying things like, "You can't write that down! What will others think?" then it could be inhibiting the process.

Let your social editor go on vacation and write with clear honesty about what you experienced from your point of view or from the point of view of the child you were when the abuse occurred.

Acknowledgement Through Talk Therapy

Some survivors have never had the experience of trusting or feeling safe with another person. A place to start may be with a licensed therapist who specializes in treating trauma survivors. You may feel the need to verbalize your experience to a trusted therapist or someone else, but it's also normal to feel a little uncomfortable about it during the early stages of healing.

One of the purposes of therapy is to create an environment of safety where missed developmental needs can be re-established. Survivors of trauma have learned to be resilient and, with proper help, can take that power of resilience to move beyond the trauma and pursue a life with power and direction.

Trust is something that requires effort – it doesn't come easily. Find a therapist, mentor, or guide who is not afraid to hear your story, one who can abide the truth as it unfolds and is spoken. Therapy can be powerful as it creates an environment of safety where past trauma can be explored without fear of criticism or judgement.

Although talk therapy may be helpful to the healing process, it has some limitations. Many who enter talk therapy to deal with past trauma immediately notice that using verbal language can present challenges. Some of our deepest emotions are impossible to put into

words. Many survivors have the feeling that no matter how well-intentioned another person might be, he or she can never come to know the absolute truth about their trauma experience. That's true, but having another person gain a full understanding is not necessary for you to heal.

The most important thing is that you fully Acknowledge the abuse to yourself. Making peace with yourself is the overall goal of healing. When you feel empowered and at peace in your own body and mind, the goal has been achieved. A trained professional can help you do this.



The Importance of the Right Therapist

The therapeutic relationship is unique in that the information discussed is privileged and remains confidential. Finding the right therapist is crucial. If you are seeking therapy, it may be useful to visit four or five therapists before you decide. If you ask for an informational, introductory interview, many will accommodate your request. During the interview, feel free to ask questions about their model and philosophies of treatment. You may also ask what training they have had in treating sexual trauma survivors. Pay attention to how you feel when you are with these different therapists, and then make the best decision for you.

The vast majority of professional counselors and therapists are good people with a deep desire to help those who are struggling. As you enter the therapeutic relationship it's important to understand that therapists are also human. To enter a therapeutic relationship takes courage from both parties, and both should be honored for the effort.

You'll be relieved once your story is shared with someone else who can show understanding in a non-judgmental way. Many survivors of sexual trauma feel they are dirty and unworthy of anything positive in life. When a survivor is able to tell her deepest feelings and hidden secrets in a safe environment with someone who can be trusted, the burdens of the past can be lightened.

Jenny's Acknowledgement Journey

Jenny admitted to herself that she was not in control. She Acknowledged that her addiction was an unhealthy way of coping with her past and she needed to move past her denial and seek help. The first thing Jenny tried was journaling. It was liberating for her to write down all of the things going on in her mind. At a certain point she realized that she needed to go to the next level to continue on her healing journey.

Acknowledgement is an ongoing process. Jenny learned that as she worked with a trusted therapist, she had to keep getting back in touch with herself, Acknowledge where she was making progress and where she still needed help.

Jenny took responsibility for her healing journey and knew she had to keep moving forward while being gentle with herself on the setbacks, triggers, and weaknesses she had.

Key Concepts in this Chapter

- Acknowledgement is accepting truth, whatever it is.
- Acknowledgement is knowing that your abuse happened. It wasn't your fault, but it is within your power to heal, change, and realize where you are and what you need to do to heal.
- Acknowledgement is knowing that you can change.
- Acknowledgement is not a one-time event. You need to continually check in with yourself and see where you are making progress and where you still need help.
- Two helpful strategies are journaling and talking to a therapist.

Strategy 3

Power Through Surrender: Let IT Be

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We can't, we're afraid!" they responded.

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We can't, we will fall!" they responded.

"Come to the edge," he said.

And they came. And he pushed them. And they flew.

-Guillaume Apollinaire-

Jenny struggled for years with an addiction to food (which she realized was part of her truth when she Acknowledged it), and she was losing hope of ever getting over it. In her desperation, she sought professional help. She had gotten herself into a vicious cycle of feeling bad, eating to feel better, and then feeling bad because she was

eating so much. Jenny began feeling defeated and out of control.

After she understood the limbic part of her brain, she recognized that these constant thoughts about food came from her limbic system and weren't in her direct control.

Jenny needed to learn about her trauma voice and find Power Through Surrender.



What is Power Through Surrender?

Power Through Surrender is knowing what to fight and, more importantly, what NOT to fight. As it relates to healing from sexual trauma, the concept of Surrender is a paradox. A paradox is a statement that leads to a conclusion that seems senseless and logically unacceptable. If our goal is to empower and strengthen you, then why would we talk about a concept that seems to be contrary to that? This paradox is at the heart of becoming a Mindful Warrior. Understanding this powerful concept of what and when to fight can empower you and help you set the course for a better life.

Struggle for Control

Those who battle past trauma issues are all too familiar with the struggle for control. By the time you enter treatment or reach out for help, you may have tried numerous strategies to control unwanted thoughts and actions. This struggle for control is the wrong fight for the Mindful Warrior.

Triggers and past memories will come up from time to time. It's the nature of the limbic system that those will occur. Having thoughts and even cravings isn't the issue at all. The issue is learning what to do with them. The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope that you are learning can be used as a filter between the thoughts and your response.

If every trigger or trauma memory is put through the filter of the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope, the probability significantly increases that you will be able to make appropriate decisions that will have positive consequences. George H. Eifert wrote, "Several independent lines of research suggest that attempts to suppress and control unwanted thoughts and feelings can result in more (not fewer) unwanted thoughts and emotions." With the Power Through Surrender, you are neither suppressing nor controlling them.

With increased understanding of how the limbic system works, as well as understanding of Awareness and Acknowledgement, you now have the foundation to make an informed choice on how to respond. When past trauma thoughts or triggers crash upon you, there are four ways to respond. You can:

1. Run away from them
2. Fight them with sheer willpower
3. Freeze and dissociate
4. Simply acknowledge them and let them be through Surrender.

When we are in the midst of chaos let go of the need to control it.

-Leo Babauta-

When you become frustrated with a past memory you'll only give it more power by yelling "Stop it!" or "Go away!" Fighting in this way only makes the memory stronger. The limbic system doesn't understand logic but may interpret such language as a threat to your survival.

You have to manage the limbic system by strengthening the prefrontal cortex, *not* by arguing with the limbic system.

Only one choice has proven to be effective in the long run and that is learning to Surrender as you let the thoughts be. Do nothing with them. In other words, after you realize the disturbing thought comes from the limbic system, just let IT be.

The Trauma Voice

Though we first mentioned this in the chapter on Trauma and the Brain, it bears repeating here. In the past, the limbic system has convinced you that subconscious feelings are your conscious, rational thoughts.

Something that will be helpful on your healing journey is becoming more aware of your trauma voice. The trauma voice is any thought or feeling related to past abuse issues. When the triggering thought is recognized, you'll be able to say, "Oh, there IT (capital I, capital T) is."

The limbic system signals you are sick, scared, or anxious. The prefrontal cortex then recognizes IT but rationally deducts that you are safe right now. This type of processing is happening continually for you, every hour of the day. The stronger your prefrontal cortex is, the less likely the limbic system's signals will derail your thoughts.

Power Through Surrender and the Healing Journey

Survivors often say, “How am I supposed to Surrender these thoughts without letting them take over?” The paradox is that when you learn to peacefully recognize these thoughts, they tend to lose their power because you are not fighting them. Such thoughts are simply treated as events to be experienced as a part of being human.

Trying to put the experience of Surrender into words is challenging because every individual experiences it differently and it encompasses several principles.

Some people may have a powerful enlightening experience when coming to Surrender, but for most it seems to be a process, not an event. It's normal for feelings to fluctuate from day to day as you learn to live in a state of Surrender and humility. Beginning the move toward Surrender starts with the desire to change. Change is a process, a daily ongoing matter. Until you truly understand Surrender, you'll continue to battle with past memories or self-defeating behaviors, thinking you're strong enough to manage them through control.

You may be asking yourself, “What exactly am I supposed to be Surrendering to?” We're asking you to Surrender to those things you can't change and have no power to do anything about. We are also asking you to Surrender to the fact that you cannot control what thoughts and triggers enter your mind nor the response from the limbic system. It's a waste of time and energy to be engaged in a fight that is unwinnable.

Much of the suffering you experience in life can be directly related to your need for control. All of us want to feel

*Thoughts aren't facts
so don't take them
seriously.*

-Ruby Wax-

like we're in control. Initially, it makes us feel weak and uncertain to realize we're not. But if you Surrender to not fighting that triggering thought, power will come. As a Mindful Warrior, you manage the triggering thought by:

1. Grounding yourself in the present.
2. Recognizing IT.
3. Letting IT be.

Jenny Uses Power Through Surrender

When Jenny learned about Power Through Surrender, she was able to deal with her addiction to food. When she had a craving she named it by saying, "There IT is. My limbic system is doing what IT has learned to do. I don't need to be angry with IT or fight IT. I choose to let IT be."

Every time Jenny had a craving for food she would say this to herself and then make the decision to get a drink of water instead of indulging in her unhealthy desire. Through this she was able to strengthen her prefrontal cortex, recognize her trauma voice, and find Power Through Surrender.

Key Concepts in this Chapter

- Power Through Surrender is learning how your trauma voice talks to you and learning to let IT be.
- With a trigger you can address it with one of four reactions: fight, flight, freeze, or Surrender. Surrender will allow you to strengthen your prefrontal cortex and allow you to manage your triggers more effectively.
- When you have a triggering thought, recognize that it isn't *you* talking; it's your limbic system.

- Manage your triggers by 1) Grounding yourself in the present, 2) Recognizing IT, and 3) Letting IT be.

Strategy 4

Mindfulness: I Choose

The ancestor of every action is a thought.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson-

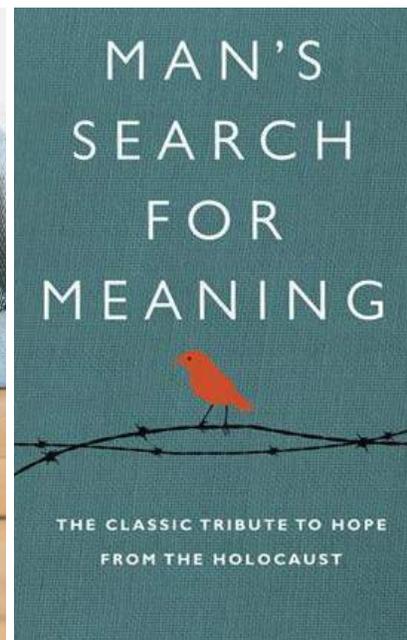
The healing journey was going well for Jenny. When she had triggers or felt anxiety, she practiced grounding techniques to bring herself back to the present moment. She learned to Acknowledge where she was and how she could improve as well as practiced Power Through Surrender.

Jenny wondered what more she could do to not just survive, but thrive. She'd learned that she needed to strengthen her prefrontal cortex, but she hadn't made it a priority. Now it seemed like the perfect time to see if she could find ways to do that. Mindfulness, the next strategy, was her answer.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the ability to focus on empowering thoughts and feelings while choosing to co-exist with non-productive thoughts and feelings. Through Mindfulness you have the power of choice. Can you choose to be a certain way regardless of what is happening in the outside environment? The answer to that is a resounding *yes!*

One of the greatest examples of this concept comes from Viktor Frankl, a prisoner of war in a concentration camp during World War II. He had all his freedom, possessions, and loved ones stripped from him. Despite his horrible situation, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* he wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way...between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."



Awareness and Mindfulness are similar but with one distinct difference. Increased Awareness of moment-to-moment living is meant to

help you recognize triggers or negative thoughts. Mindfulness is used on an ongoing, everyday basis to train and strengthen your prefrontal cortex to reduce the frequency and duration of triggers, traumatic thoughts, and traumatic memories.

Mindfulness training is not some mystical process, but a very practical, everyday method to focus or direct your thoughts. When certain negative thoughts or cravings come into your mind, the prefrontal cortex has to do something with them. This is where your individual choice comes into play. The place between stimulus and response is where you have the power to make a choice.

We want you to understand that you have the power to take charge in spite of the trauma you've experienced. You can't change the past, but you can learn to manage it. In saying this, we in no way wish to minimize what you've been through, but we know how strong you can become as you are empowered with knowledge and choice. Mindfulness will teach you to clearly distinguish between the past, present, and future, allowing you to choose.

Learned Helplessness

When individuals are sexually abused as children, they can mistakenly come to believe that they will always be a victim to someone bigger and stronger. They can start to feel powerless over events in their life. It's a normal response. But you can break out of this mindset and create a life you may never have dreamed of.

In the 1960s, Steven Maier of the University of Colorado collaborated with Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania to show how animals learn helplessness when repeatedly placed in situations where they can't get free. The researchers placed dogs in locked cages and repeatedly shocked them. After administering many different courses of

electric shock, the researchers would open the door of the cages and then shock the dogs again with the clear expectations that the dogs would run out of their cages to safety. What happened stunned the researchers. The dogs sat there and took the punishment.

When another group of dogs was placed in the same situation, without the history of being shocked beforehand, they immediately ran out of the cage for safety. The researchers concluded that the first group of dogs learned helplessness because nothing they did made a difference. After electroshock, the researchers would literally have to drag the dogs out of the cage.

Fortunately, the end of the research project provides hope. The dogs could be taught how to get out of the cage. The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope are a system that can teach you to begin this process of becoming free and getting you out of the cage of past experiences.

When you use Mindfulness to strengthen your prefrontal cortex you can find your way out of the “cage” that your memories and triggers have built for you.

Mindfulness Strategies

How exactly do you use Mindfulness to strengthen the prefrontal cortex? Below are ten questions or statements to help you practice. Each of these questions or statements engages that prefrontal part of your brain and allows you to become more grounded in your everyday life. Take a minute to go through the following list and practice Mindfulness. State each answer out loud to yourself and be as precise as you can.

1. Where are you right now?
2. What time, day, and date is it?
3. What are you doing right now?

4. What are you feeling in your body right now? Focus on each sensation.
5. What emotion are you feeling right now? What words would you use to describe your feelings?
6. State the purpose you are pursuing right now. (“I’m on my way home from work...” or “I’m working on a project...” etc.)
7. What action can you take right now that would benefit another person?
8. What can this precise moment teach you?
9. Pick a color and notice everything around you that is that color.
10. Look for a bird and watch it in flight. Keep this thought in your mind until you see a bird today.

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back the wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character, and will.

-William James-

Why It Works

Neuroscientists have discovered that the brain cannot tell the difference between a thought that is vividly imagined in the “mind’s eye” and something that is seen by the physical eyes. Thought alone creates a flow of chemical reactions in the brain, which are then carried throughout the body. All behavior is preceded by a thought. For healing and wholeness to be realized, people must be taught how to become more Aware of their own thought processes and then how to manage the thoughts and direct

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment non-judgementally.

-Jon Kabat-Zinn-

them through Mindfulness. Mindfulness is making a conscious choice as to which thoughts you focus on.

The following statement by Dr. Jeffery Schwartz has profound implications as it relates to the process of recovery: “The quality of awareness or attention determines the nature of the consciousness that arises, and thus the

action that takes place. The only willful choice one has is the quality of attention one gives to a thought at any moment...the strain of attention is the fundamental act of will.”

Pay particular attention to the last sentence: “The strain of attention is the fundamental act of will.” The foundation of a person’s choice lies in that one sentence. At every moment of our lives we have a choice as to which thoughts we’ll give our attention to and which ones we’ll let slip away. Most people are not accustomed to the focus this requires. Even if you feel frozen and helpless because of past trauma, the process of change and empowerment can begin in an instant with a choice. Learning to watch your thoughts through Mindfulness is essential on the path of recovery.

Change Your Perspective

Practicing Mindfulness can also help change your perspective on negative emotions and discomfort. It will open up new possibilities of moving from a state of “being” to a state of “moving” towards courageous and adventurous living. You can learn to move beyond the pain of the past rather than focus on it all the time.

Mindfulness helps you strengthen your prefrontal cortex so it has

the capacity to manage the limbic system. As you learn to be more mindful of your thoughts from moment to moment, you can begin to take charge of your life and awaken the Mindful Warrior.

Learning to focus on certain thoughts while letting others go requires practice, but it can be accomplished. Refocusing attention away from an intrusive or triggering thought is one of the most challenging things you'll ever do.

The good news is that the brain is a living organism that is constantly changing. It's capable of rewiring itself by the active practice of Mindfulness and self-directed physical activities (like yoga). When you choose to pay attention to one thought over another, the brain changes. If these thoughts are healthy and healing, the brain (including the limbic system) learns to respond in a productive way.

Mindfulness requires the prefrontal cortex to be aware of and oversee the impulsive limbic system. This requires self-discipline, but it is the key that produces positive results in the life of someone who is trying to change from past trauma. You can learn to recognize how restless the mind is and then choose to focus on certain thoughts that are based on values and goals.

It's the nature of an untrained mind to keep moving, moving, and moving, but the mind is teachable. You can learn to tell your mind to stay and it will stay. This is the key to recovery, healing, and lasting change.

One of the first steps in strengthening the prefrontal cortex is to practice Mindfulness exercises that engage the body. It's like a muscle that will grow with proper exercises.

We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make our world.

-Buddha-

Jenny and Mindfulness

Jenny found the most effective way for her to practice Mindfulness was through trauma-sensitive yoga. Yoga gave her the opportunity to reconnect with her body, center her thoughts, and ground herself in the present moment without having a crisis. In addition, she took daily walks and practiced Mindfulness while she was walking. Every day she found some way to strengthen her prefrontal cortex through Mindfulness.

Key Concepts in this Chapter

- Mindfulness is the ability to focus on empowering thoughts and feelings while choosing to co-exist with non-productive thoughts and feelings.
- Unlike the Awareness strategy, which is for moments of crisis, Mindfulness can be used every day to strengthen your prefrontal cortex and allow you to appropriately and proactively manage triggers when they happen.
- You can use any of the 10 questions or statements listed above to practice Mindfulness every day. You can also try something physical like trauma-sensitive yoga.
- Mindfulness gives you the power to choose what you focus on and how you react to everyday situations.

Strategy 5

Faith: I Believe

*Faith is taking the first step
even when you don't see
the whole staircase.*

-Martin Luther King, Jr.-

Like so many survivors of childhood sexual abuse, Jenny had a lot of anxiety any time she thought about the future. As she progressed in her healing journey, she decided that she wanted to take steps to remedy that. In addition, she began to think more and more about her beliefs in a higher power, a power greater than herself. They had altered and shifted since she was a child, and she felt she needed to more clearly define what she believed.

So Jenny turned to Faith to help her with the next steps on her healing journey.

When you get to the end of all the light you know and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: either you will be given something solid to stand on, or you will be taught to fly.

-Edward Teller-

What is Faith?

Faith, defined for our purposes, consists of two components: 1) Planning for a bright future and 2) Believing in something greater than yourself. This can be a religion, a moral code, science, or any other belief you may have in something bigger than yourself. Faith in a force or belief can change the way you view the future. The previous strategies you've learned about are all focused on teaching you what to do with your thoughts. Faith is the act of moving forward based on your belief that wholeness and healing are

possible, even if it's difficult to think so.

Faith is the moving cause and power behind all personal and spiritual growth. This power gives you the ability to act and change. Everyday examples of faith are simple things like knowing that when you work you'll get paid or when you study you'll learn or, most applicable here, when you apply the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope, you'll heal.

When most people think of Faith, they think of spirituality. The two can be connected but are not necessarily the same thing. Spirituality is difficult to define because it's different for everyone and there is no single, widely-agreed upon definition for the term. Perhaps the closest consensus would be believing or searching for meaning in our individual relationship with a higher power in the universe. This includes the religious, non-religious, agnostic, and atheist alike. Even those who do not believe in a supreme being draw on a higher power for judgement and morality and work to reconcile those things that science cannot.

Hope and a Future Plan

Doubt due to past trauma can stifle the power of Faith to create change. By taking action and reading this book, you've become better educated on how to move forward with your life. We hope that you feel like you can put the past behind you and break free of its inhibiting influence. Hope, however small, comes from a willingness to believe and declare how you see yourself in the future. It's the result of your Faith in the possibility that you can be whole.

Picture yourself as a beautiful, strong, and independent woman. The power of Faith begins the unseen process of helping to create this. Because life is constantly moving and changing, your dreams need to be nourished carefully. The purpose of all the tools you've learned about is to help you do this in a more effective manner day by day, hour by hour. Just as a plant needs daily watering, so do your hopes.

Often times all that is missing is a simple method to provide the direction needed to bring about the change you desire. If you don't have a vision or goal, then you have no direction. As you find yourself through this healing process, you'll be empowered to live a proactive life rather than a reactive one. Being proactive means you set your own course and pursue it in a steady and healthy way.

If you're not careful, you can become like Alice in Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice in Wonderland* when she asks the Cheshire Cat for directions:

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care where –

Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.

Sadly, too many people seem to live their lives in such a manner. Faith helps you direct your thoughts in a positive, proactive direction. If you're not proactively focusing on anything in particular, then you open yourself up to the influence around you – you become reactive.

So how do you plan for a positive future? The accompanying workbook has several ways to help you create a plan for your future. One of these is a Future Vision Statement. Your Future Vision Statement is a document you create that has all of your best intentions written in the same place for you to read every day. Write all of your goals in the present tense as if they are your reality. For instance, you wouldn't write, "I will journal every day." Instead you'll write, "I journal every day." This small but distinct difference allows your dreams to seem attainable, even inevitable.

Change and Progress

Change is a process, that is ongoing and never-ending. Sometimes things change quickly, and other times things change slowly. The most important thing is the direction you are moving in. Healing from sexual abuse is not something that happens overnight, and some individuals may work on it their entire life. However long it takes, becoming whole is possible (think back to the *kintsugi* story in the introduction). With that said, you do not need to wait for complete healing to feel at peace. Peace comes as we consistently progress toward healing. We do not need to wait to arrive.

It's important that you do what you can to take charge of your life now and create the type of life you want for yourself, regardless of the past. Faith is the belief that it's worth your effort to keep trying. It's also the motivation to act on what you believe.

Faith is the final key that can empower you. As you begin to believe in yourself and draw on your higher power, you will begin the

process of unfreezing your traumatized body and brain.

Reconciliation with Your Higher Power

Some survivors have a difficult time with spirituality. They may ask, “Why would God allow this to happen to me?” or “Why wasn’t God there to protect me?”

Similar questions could be asked by those whose belief systems draw their higher power from laws, morals, or scientific truths. These are valid questions, but in order for us to live in an environment where we are free to choose, all people are allowed to make choices – even poor choices that may damage others.

Faith can be likened to a conversion experience. It’s not something that can be taught by another. When working with a patient with alcoholism who had almost lost hope of recovery, psychoanalyst Carl Jung encouraged the man to seek God’s help. To this the man replied, “I’m a religious man and I still have faith.” Jung replied, “Ordinary religious faith isn’t enough. What I’m talking about is a transforming experience, a conversion experience, if you like. I can only recommend that you place yourself in the religious atmosphere of your own choice, that you recognize your personal hopelessness, and that you cast yourself upon whatever God you think is there. The lightning of the transforming experience of conversion may then strike you. This you must try...”

Through Faith you can continue the process of personal responsibility for your own healing journey and begin planning a positive future for yourself. This is true no matter what your higher power looks like or what form your higher power takes.

Just because the past didn't turn out like you wanted it to, doesn't mean the future can't be better than you ever imagined.

-Ziad K. Adelnour-



The Law of Incubation

As you continue your healing journey, you should understand the Law of Incubation. Far too many people give up on the process of change and recovery because they are impatient with the lack of progress they see. Please remember that when it comes to healing and recovery, you are restructuring the pathways in the brain. The Law of Incubation says that for every seed that is planted there is an incubation period – an undetermined amount of time that the seed needs to establish itself. Just because you don't see immediate results doesn't mean the change isn't happening.

Be patient and steady.

Jenny and Faith

Jenny created a future vision statement with a corresponding vision board based on the instructions in her workbook. The words and images were placed in her home where she would see them every day and remember what she was working toward and how far she'd already come. She began exercising

her faith in something bigger than herself, and that gave her strength to proactively pursue her healing journey.

Key Concepts in this Chapter

- Faith is both planning for the future and connecting with a power greater than yourself.
- Relying on a higher power means drawing strength from a source that is bigger than you. It does not necessarily mean a religious deity but whatever your view of a higher power is.
- Future vision statements and vision boards can help you put your goals and ideals in a more concrete format that allows you to reach for them daily. Faith will allow you to plan for your future without anxiety or fear. You'll be able to make positive movements every day to reach the future you hope to have.
- Healing takes time. When you become frustrated with where you are in your healing journey, remember the Law of Incubation. You're planting seeds and even though you may not see the progress, it doesn't mean there's no growth occurring.

Conclusion: You Are a Survivor

You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.

-Maya Angelou-

Jenny made a conscious choice to change her life. She is a Mindful Warrior who uses the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope every day and has created a new life for herself. She accepted the reality of what happened to her. Although it took her a while, she now knows that the abuse was not her fault in any way. She no longer looks at herself negatively. She has transformed her self-image, and, although she can't forget the past, she feels empowered to live the life she has created for herself.

When past memories of the abuse come up, she knows exactly why those thoughts are coming. She acknowledges the limbic system for doing IT's job and trying to keep her safe. She understands how IT works but no longer fights IT. She's able to distinguish between the past and present, and she no longer lets the past dictate how she functions in the present. Jenny works on strengthening her prefrontal cortex daily. She's no longer held hostage by the past and refuses to be a victim.

Remember at the beginning of the book when we discussed the Japanese art of *kintsugi*? At the beginning of her journey, Jenny felt irreparably broken. With each of the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope that she welcomed into her life, she began to feel like she was filling her broken places with gold. Jenny created her real life version of *kintsugi*.



Your Journey is Your Own

Your own healing journey may just be beginning or be well under way, but you are a survivor, a Mindful Warrior. Perhaps the greatest thing about you is your resilience. Maybe you've never thought of it this way, but regardless of the terrible things that have happened to you, you're still here.

You are alive today, and you're reading this right now. You're amazingly strong to be in this place right now. *You are a survivor!*

Now, with the guidance you've received and with ongoing support, you can reclaim your life and voice. You can learn not to just survive but to thrive. There's only one you in the universe, and you're here right now for a purpose. Although something traumatic has happened to you, you can learn from it and become more powerful than you ever imagined by plugging into the power of Faith.

We encourage you to continue with your healing journey. Although reading this book certainly helps, it is simply information. Information without appropriate action isn't sufficient. For this reason, we have created the accompanying workbook that will help you put the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope into practice. The challenge of healing and empowerment is about regaining ownership over your body and mind. It will take action to do that.

Remember the Law of Incubation – no effort you put in is wasted. Some days your progress may feel agonizingly slow; others may feel like it took barely any effort at all to do the things you needed to do for yourself. Every day is different in this ongoing healing journey, and you need to remember that.

We know you can do it. We believe in you. We consider it an honor and a privilege to be part of your healing journey.

Appendix

Start where you are.

Use what you have.

Do what you can.

-Arthur Ashe-

The purpose of this appendix is to provide a list of resources that may help you continue on your healing journey. If you feel any of these might be useful to you, we encourage you to follow up with a qualified professional in your local area. Below are both therapies and techniques. You might try them to see which are the most beneficial for you.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is currently the most popular form of therapy. Put simply, this is talk therapy. For many, talk therapy is the safest place to start when dealing with sexual abuse trauma. The main focus is on solving current problems by changing unhelpful thinking and behavior.

For many this form of therapy is useful; however, trauma survivors often need additional therapeutic methods to experience long-term healing.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

As you've learned about how trauma memories are mainly stored in the limbic system (the non-verbal part of the brain), it is easy to see why talk therapy can't be the end of treatment. Several therapeutic methods have been found that more directly reach the limbic system. One of these methods is Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing or EMDR.

When EMDR first emerged as a form of treatment, many professionals viewed it as a new fad in which a therapist wiggled their fingers in front of a client's eyes. EMDR struggled to find credibility among mental health professionals for years because of how strange it initially sounded. As evidence-based studies have been done, mental health professionals could no longer deny the valid research that supports its effectiveness, especially when treating trauma survivors. Now it's considered an industry best practice in trauma recovery treatment.

EMDR has its roots in the 1980s with Francine Shapiro. Shapiro was walking in the park when she realized that eye movements appeared to decrease the negative emotion associated with her own distressing memories. She hypothesized that eye movements had a desensitizing effect. When she experimented, she found that others had a similar response to eye movements. It became apparent, however, that eye movements by themselves did not create comprehensive therapeutic effects; Shapiro later added other treatment elements, including cognitive therapies, which eventually led to a standard procedure that is now called EMDR.

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

Yoga is a technique that can help you make peace with your body and reconnect with it in a positive way. Practicing yoga regularly will help you become more grounded. Doing this type of body work will access the limbic system (the emotional part of your brain) and engage it in the healing process. This attention can help you unfreeze emotions that may have kept you stuck for years.

The overall purpose of yoga for trauma survivors is to help you learn how to comfortably live inside your own body again. This is done by learning to become more aware of your body as you pay attention to breath and posture.

Neurofeedback

Neurofeedback is a powerful tool used to strengthen the prefrontal cortex. It teaches the brain how to stay focused and can improve creativity, athletic control, and inner awareness. Neurofeedback uses real-time displays of brain activity to teach the brain how to regulate itself. Usually sensors are placed on the scalp that measure activity in the brain. These sensors allow you to “listen” to your own brainwave activity in order to see what is happening in your brain. By learning how to focus attention, you can learn to direct your own brainwave frequencies. Effective treatment promotes frequencies that strengthen the prefrontal cortex while diminishing others.

The information is presented to the person in the form of a video game to make the process enjoyable. Many who have participated in regular neurofeedback sessions have reported increased self-esteem and a quieting of the constant chatter that many survivors experience from the limbic system.

Seeking Safety

Seeking Safety is an evidence-based, present-focused counseling model to help people heal from trauma and change self-defeating behaviors. It was developed by Lisa M. Najavits, PhD, and has been used in many countries and translated into over eight languages. Helping create safety for clients is the main focus of this model. The basic premise is that people with trauma backgrounds cannot begin to work on healing until they first feel safe. The *Seeking Safety Workbook* has many worthwhile assignments that have been helpful for many in the process of healing and recovery.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is another evidence-based treatment approach. The simplest way to define this concept is *a way of being with people that enhances the intrinsic motivation to change*. We like this approach because it focuses on strengthening a person's own motivation to change. Motivation to change comes from within and is not imposed externally.

Motivational interviewing is a non-judgmental, non-confrontational, and non-adversarial approach. By creating a safe environment, clients can explore the reasons for the current problems they are dealing with. This approach helps clients accept that ambivalence (or feeling two ways about something) is a normal part of life and that direct persuasion from an outside force is not an effective method for resolving it. A clinician attempts to increase the client's awareness of the potential problems caused, consequences experienced, and risks faced as a result of the behavior in question. Alternately, therapists help clients envision a better future and become increasingly motivated to achieve it.

Acceptance Commitment Therapy

Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a recent and rapidly evolving behavior therapy. At its core ACT is not as concerned with thoughts and emotions that occur, but with what we do with them once they're present.

This model is particularly effective in treating anxiety disorders. The overall goal of ACT is to help individuals live a full, rich, and meaningful life, rather than becoming symptom free, which, of course, isn't likely. ACT teaches that it's okay to have whatever unwanted thoughts and feelings come. Rather than struggle with these thoughts and feelings, you're taught new ways of relating to them as part of your life experience.

Resources

As you continue on your healing journey you might want to read other books that may have inspiration and insights to offer you. Below is a list of books for you to consider as you work to understand your trauma.

- *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel van der Kolk
- *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges* by Amy Cuddy
- *Overcoming Trauma Through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body* by David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper
- *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* by Francine Shapiro
- *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past* by Peter Levine
- *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck

“Within each of us lies
not only the potential, but the power
to make a difference.”

- SHELAINÉ MAXFIELD -