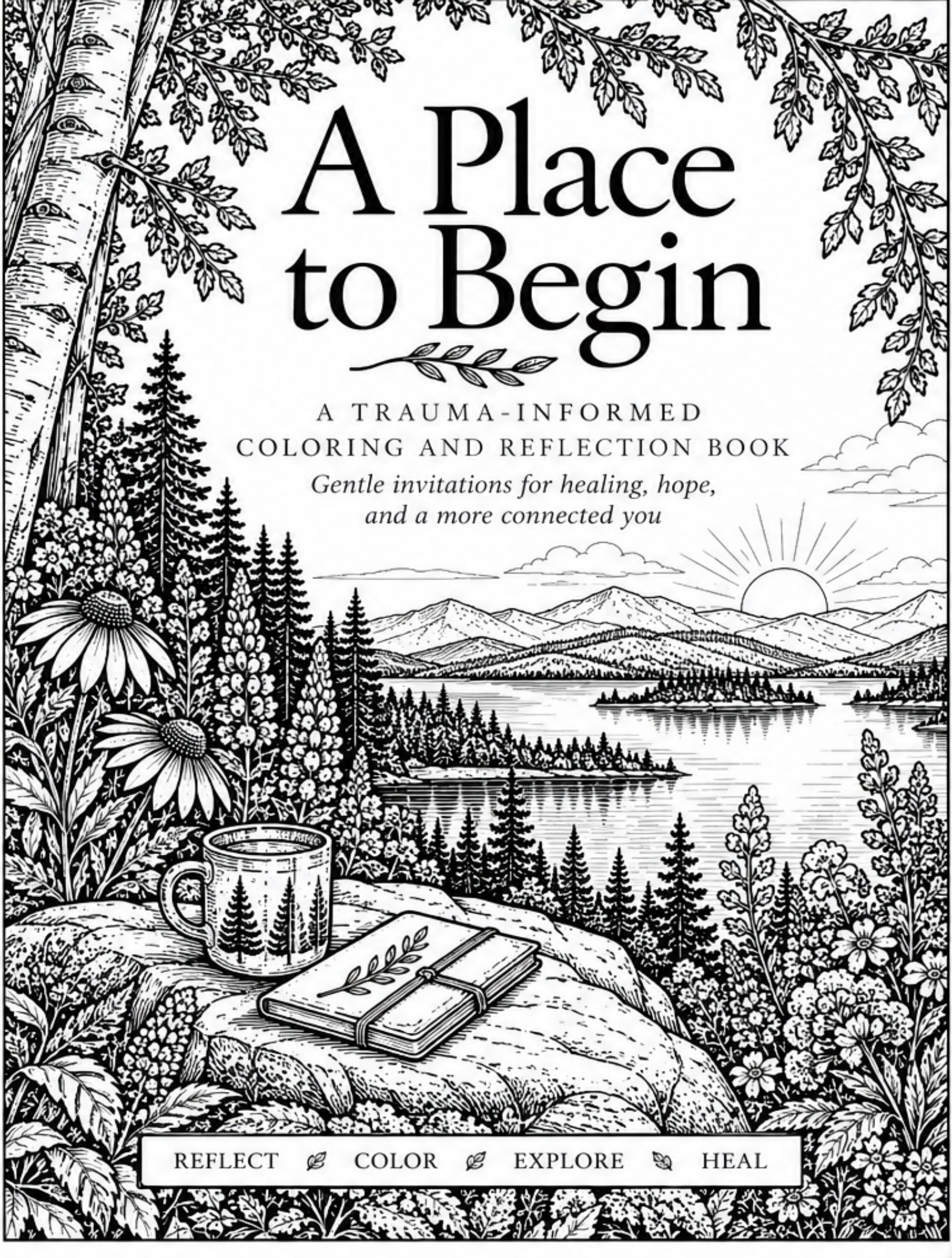

A Place to Begin
A TRAUMA-INFORMED COLORING AND REFLECTION BOOK
Gentle invitations for healing, hope, and a more connected you
REFLECT COLOR EXPLORE HEAL

WELCOME TO

A Place to Begin

A TRAUMA-INFORMED COLORING AND REFLECTION BOOK



ABOUT THIS BOOK

A Place to Begin offers gentle invitations to slow down, reflect, and reconnect with yourself. Each chapter includes a detailed, hand-drawn illustration to color and a short reflection with supportive information, trauma-informed perspective, and journaling prompts.

This book is not about fixing yourself. It's about offering a safe and compassionate space to explore your thoughts, feelings, and experiences—exactly as they are. Healing isn't always linear, and you don't have to do it alone. You are allowed to take your time.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Start anywhere. There is no wrong order. You can follow the chapters or simply open to a page that feels right for you.

Color at your own pace. The detailed illustrations are here for you to enjoy. Coloring can be a calming, grounding practice that helps reduce stress and supports focus and presence.

Read and reflect. Each chapter includes a short reflection with trauma-informed insights and gentle prompts. You can write, draw, or simply think about the questions.

Make it your own. You might color, journal, doodle, or use this book as a space for quiet time. There is no right or wrong way to engage with the pages.

Come back anytime. Your needs may change from day to day. It's okay to revisit chapters that feel meaningful or to skip ones that aren't a fit right now.



This book is a reminder that healing, growth, and joy are possible.
You are already enough, and every small step matters.
Welcome to a place to begin.



A Place to Begin

A trauma-informed coloring and reflection book

Shared by Pioneer Recovery Center

Women's Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment

Cloquet, Minnesota

218-879-6844

These pages are an invitation to explore at your own pace.
Color, reflect, write, or simply enjoy the artwork.
There is no right or wrong way to begin.

For personal reflection, supportive conversations, and recovery-focused settings.



CHAPTER 1

BEGINNING WHERE YOU ARE



You Don't Have to Earn Rest

Our nervous systems respond to the demands, stress, and experiences of our lives. When we have spent a long time managing difficult circumstances, slowing down may feel unfamiliar—or even uncomfortable.

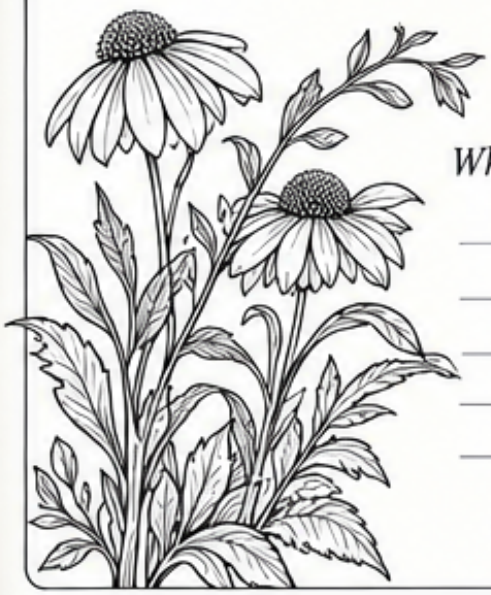
Rest is not something we have to earn through productivity or achievement. Taking time to pause can be one part of caring for ourselves. Rest can help our bodies and minds feel a little more regulated, and it can create space for clarity, healing, and connection.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Rest can look different for everyone.
- Rest can be active or quiet.
- Even small moments of pause can make a difference.
- You get to decide what feels supportive and safe for you.
- It's okay if rest feels unfamiliar at first. This is a practice, not a requirement.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Rest can be challenging when our nervous systems have been in survival mode for a long time. Many people who have experienced trauma have learned to stay busy, be constantly alert, or ignore their own needs. These responses made sense at the time. Now, we can gently explore what helps us feel safe, resourced, and more present in the here and now.



A GENTLE INVITATION

What helps you experience a moment of ease?



You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong way to respond.


REST
EXPLORE
HEAL
CONNECT
CREATE



Safety Begins With Choice

Trauma can involve experiences where our choices were limited or taken away. When this happens, it can affect how safe we feel, even long after the experience has ended.

Having meaningful choices—big and small—can help rebuild a sense of safety and personal agency. Choice reminds our nervous systems that we have some control in the present moment, and that our needs and preferences matter. It can be as simple as choosing what to wear, what to eat, where to sit, or how to spend a quiet moment.

You get to choose what feels right for you, and you can change your mind. There is no single "right" path.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Choice helps build a sense of safety and empowerment.
- All choices are valid, even small ones.
- It's okay to take time to figure out what feels right.
- You can change your mind.
- Your needs and preferences matter.
- Choosing for yourself is a practice, and it can get easier.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

A sense of choice and agency can help counteract the effects of trauma, especially when we've had experiences where our boundaries, needs, or decisions were not respected.

Even small, everyday choices can help our nervous systems remember that we have influence in our own lives.

Choice doesn't mean we have to do everything on our own. It means we get to consider what feels right for us, and that our voice matters.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What is one small choice you can make for yourself today?

There is no right or wrong answer. You can write, draw, or simply notice.





Your Responses Are Human

Our nervous systems are designed to keep us safe. When we experience threat—whether it is danger, chaos, neglect, or overwhelming stress—our bodies can respond in different ways: fight, flight, freeze, or shutdown. These are survival responses, not personal failures.

These responses happen automatically and can be helpful in dangerous situations. The challenge is that when we have experienced trauma, our nervous system may continue to respond as if we are not safe, even when the immediate danger has passed.

Understanding how our nervous system works can help us have more compassion for ourselves and more tools for feeling safer now.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Your nervous system is doing its best to keep you safe.
- These responses are survival strategies, not character flaws.
- You can't always control the first response, but you can learn to recognize what is happening and explore what might help.
- It is possible to build new patterns over time.
- You are more than your survival responses.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

There is no "right" or "wrong" way to respond to stress.

Our nervous systems adapt to our experiences. Responses that once helped us survive may still show up, even when we are no longer in danger.

This makes sense. It is a sign of how hard our bodies and minds have worked to keep us safe. With awareness, patience, and support, we can learn new ways to respond and feel more regulated in the present.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What do you notice in your body when you feel safe?
What might help your nervous system settle?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





Finding Your Ground

When we have experienced trauma, our bodies can sometimes stay in a heightened state of alert. It may feel like we are still in danger, even when we are safe in the present moment. This can make it harder to focus, rest, or feel connected to ourselves and others.

Grounding can help us return to the present moment by using our senses and our surroundings. Grounding doesn't change what happened in the past or make difficult feelings disappear. It simply gives our nervous systems a chance to pause, notice what is here now, and find a bit more steadiness.

There is no single "right" way to ground. What feels helpful can be different for everyone. The goal is not to force yourself to feel calm, but to offer your body and mind something that feels supportive and safe.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Grounding can help you feel more present and connected.
- You can use your senses to notice what is here now.
- Even small moments of grounding can make a difference.
- It's okay if some strategies feel more helpful than others.
- You don't have to change how you feel to begin noticing what you need.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

When we have experienced trauma, our nervous systems may stay in a state of high alert. This is a natural protective response, not a sign of weakness or failure.

Grounding can be one way to help our nervous systems recognize that we are safe in the present moment. By noticing our surroundings and using our senses, we can give our bodies and minds a chance to settle.

Grounding is an invitation, not an obligation. You get to choose what feels safe and supportive for you.



A GENTLE INVITATION

What sights, sounds, textures, or experiences help you feel connected to the present?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





CHAPTER 5

THE NEED FOR CONNECTION

We Are Wired for Connection



Human beings develop and thrive through relationships. From the very beginning of our lives, we are wired for connection. Supportive relationships can help us feel safer, explore the world, and develop a stronger sense of who we are.

Trauma can make connection feel complicated. It may be harder to trust others, and closeness can sometimes feel overwhelming or unsafe. These are natural responses to difficult experiences, not personal failures.

We do not need to be close to everyone, and we do not need to trust everyone. Healing can include learning to recognize which relationships feel respectful, supportive, and safe enough for us. Connection can look different for each person. It might include family, friends, mentors, pets, nature, community, or spiritual relationships.

We can be connected without losing our individuality. Like the trees in a forest, we each have our own roots, branches, and space. We can grow in our own way while also being part of something larger.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Needing connection is a natural part of being human.
- Healthy relationships make room for both closeness and independence.
- Trust can develop gradually, at your own pace.
- You can learn to recognize what supportive relationships feel like.
- Connection doesn't require giving up who you are.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Attachment and connection are essential for our well-being. Our early relationships shape how we see ourselves, how we relate to others, and how safe we feel in the world.

When we have experienced trauma, it can affect our ability to trust and connect. This is a natural adaptation, not a sign that we are broken.

Healing happens in relationships—through consistent safety, respect, acceptance, and care. We can learn new ways to connect that honor our needs, boundaries, and sense of self.

A GENTLE INVITATION

Who or what helps you feel seen, understood, or connected?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





Every Emotion Has a Place

Emotions are a natural and important part of being human. They give us information about what we need, what matters to us, and what might be happening in our internal and external worlds.

When we have experienced trauma, emotions can sometimes feel especially intense, confusing, or difficult to identify. This is because our nervous systems may be more sensitive to certain triggers, and past experiences can make some emotions feel bigger or harder to manage.

All emotions are valid. Some feel pleasant, while others can be uncomfortable. We don't have to judge our feelings, act on every emotion, or make them disappear. Learning to notice our emotions with curiosity can help us understand ourselves and make choices that support our well-being.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- All emotions are valid, even when they are uncomfortable.
- Feelings and behaviors are different. We can accept an emotion while choosing how to respond.
- It is possible to experience several emotions at once.
- Sometimes we don't know what we are feeling, and that's okay.
- Emotional awareness is a skill we can develop gradually.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Emotions are a natural part of the human experience.

Trauma can affect how we experience and express our emotions. Some emotions may feel more intense, some may feel numb, and others may be harder to identify.

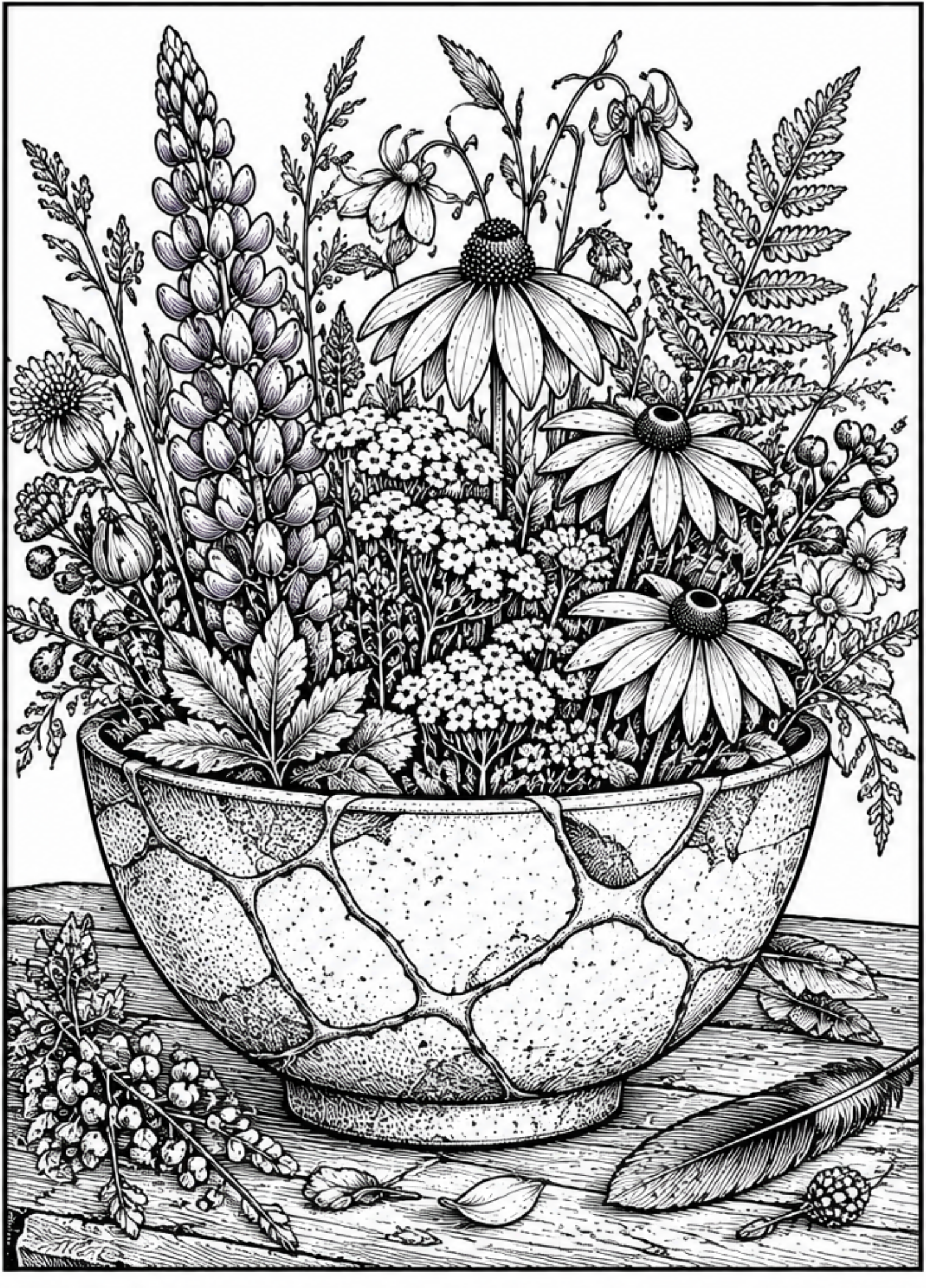
These are understandable responses to overwhelming or prolonged stress, not signs of weakness or failure.

With awareness, support, and practice, we can learn new ways to notice, understand, and express our emotions that feel safer and more grounded.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What emotions have been showing up for you lately?
What might they be telling you about your needs?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





You Are More Than What Happened to You

Trauma can shape how we see ourselves. Sometimes we carry shame for things that happened to us, choices we made while trying to survive, or ways we learned to protect ourselves. These responses often made sense at the time, even when they no longer serve us now.

Self-compassion doesn't mean avoiding responsibility or pretending difficult experiences didn't happen. It means learning to understand ourselves without unnecessary judgment.

Many behaviors that no longer serve us began as adaptations to difficult circumstances. We can recognize why those patterns developed while also learning new ways of responding.

You are more than your most difficult moments. You are worthy of kindness, including from yourself. Healing can include both accountability and self-compassion.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- You are not defined by your most difficult experiences.
- Understanding a behavior is different from excusing harm.
- Self-compassion and accountability can coexist.
- You deserve kindness, including from yourself.
- Change is possible without shame being the motivation.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Shame can be a heavy burden for people who have experienced trauma. We may carry shame for things that happened to us, choices we made while trying to survive, or ways we learned to protect ourselves.

These responses often made sense given what we were experiencing at the time. They were adaptations, not failures.

Self-compassion allows us to look at our experiences with more understanding and less judgment. It creates space to recognize our strength, our resilience, and our humanity.

We can honor our past, take responsibility for our choices, and still treat ourselves with kindness.

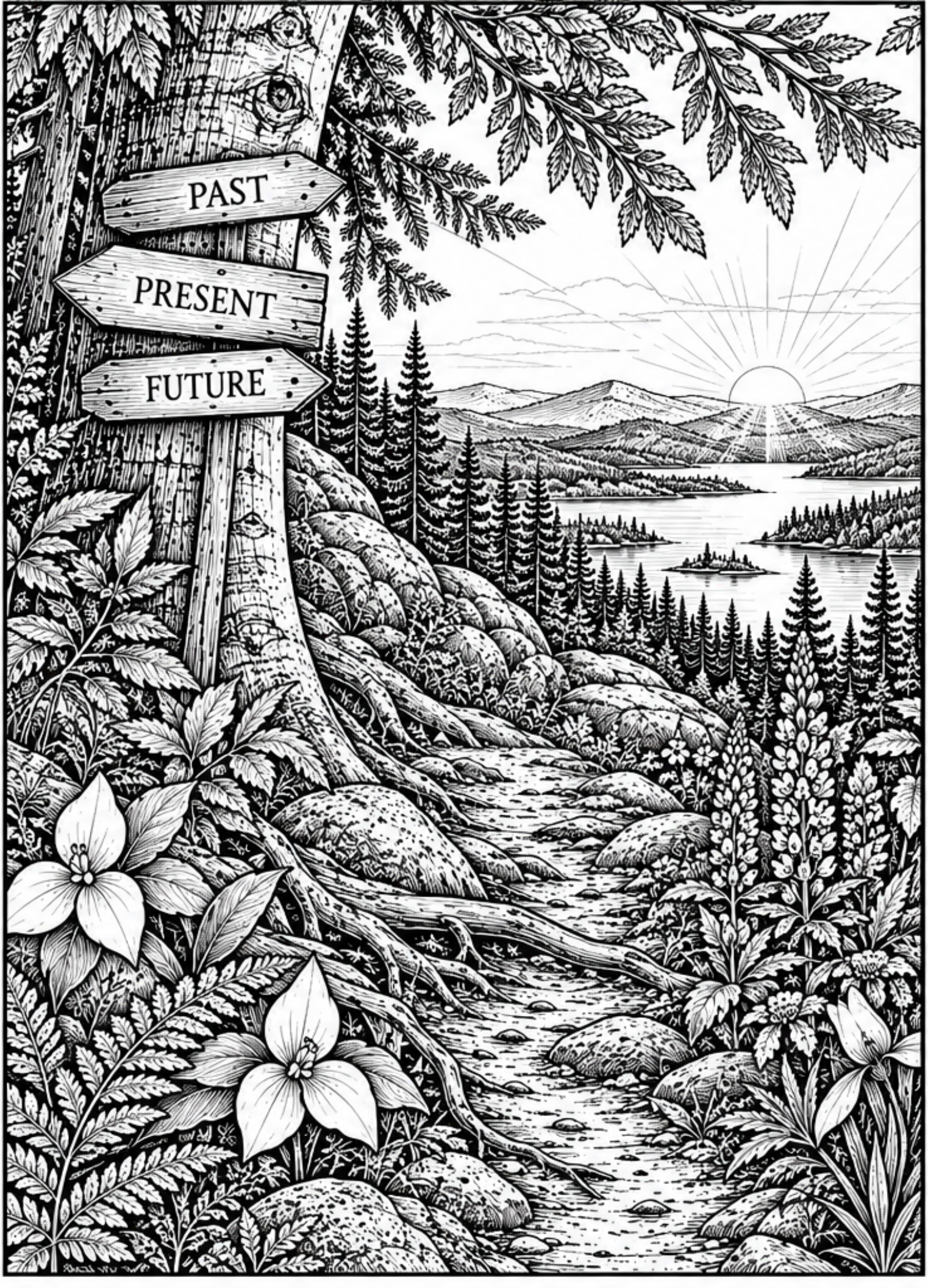


A GENTLE INVITATION

What might change if you spoke to yourself with the same compassion you would offer someone you care about?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.




PAST
PRESENT
FUTURE



Healing Is a Journey

Healing is not a straight line. It often involves progress, setbacks, and moving at a pace that feels right for you. There is no single destination or timeline. Healing can look different for everyone.

Some days may feel easier, while others may feel more difficult. Both are part of the process. Change often happens in small steps, and those steps can still lead to meaningful growth.

As we build safety, develop supportive relationships, and learn new ways of responding to challenges, we can create a life that feels more aligned with our values, needs, and hopes.

Healing does not mean forgetting the past or never struggling again. It means finding new ways to care for ourselves, make choices that support our well-being, and move toward the life we want.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Healing is not a linear process.
- Progress can be found in small steps.
- Setbacks are a normal part of growth.
- There is no one right timeline.
- You get to define what healing looks like for you.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Healing is not about becoming someone new or leaving parts of yourself behind. It's about integrating our experiences and finding ways to live with more safety, self-understanding, and choice.

Trauma can affect how we see the world, how we relate to others, and how we feel in our bodies. Healing gives us the opportunity to explore these impacts with compassion and to develop new skills, resources, and supports.

We can move forward while honoring where we have been. Our past is part of our story, but it does not have to define our future.

A GENTLE INVITATION

Where are you on your healing journey right now?
What helps you keep going?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





Progress Looks Different for Everyone

Change doesn't usually happen all at once. It often happens in small, steady steps, moments of noticing, and choices made over time. Progress can be quiet, nonlinear, and sometimes hard to see.

For people who have experienced trauma, change may feel especially challenging. Our nervous systems may need more time, support, and repetition to learn new patterns. Setbacks are a normal part of the process and don't mean we are failing.

Progress isn't about being perfect or reaching a specific destination. It's about moving toward a life that feels safer, more connected, and more aligned with our values. Every step matters, no matter how small.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Progress can be slow, and it can still be meaningful.
- Setbacks are part of the process.
- Small steps add up over time.
- You get to set your own pace.
- Progress looks different for everyone.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Healing is not a straight line. Trauma can affect how we experience change, including how we handle challenges, setbacks, and transitions.

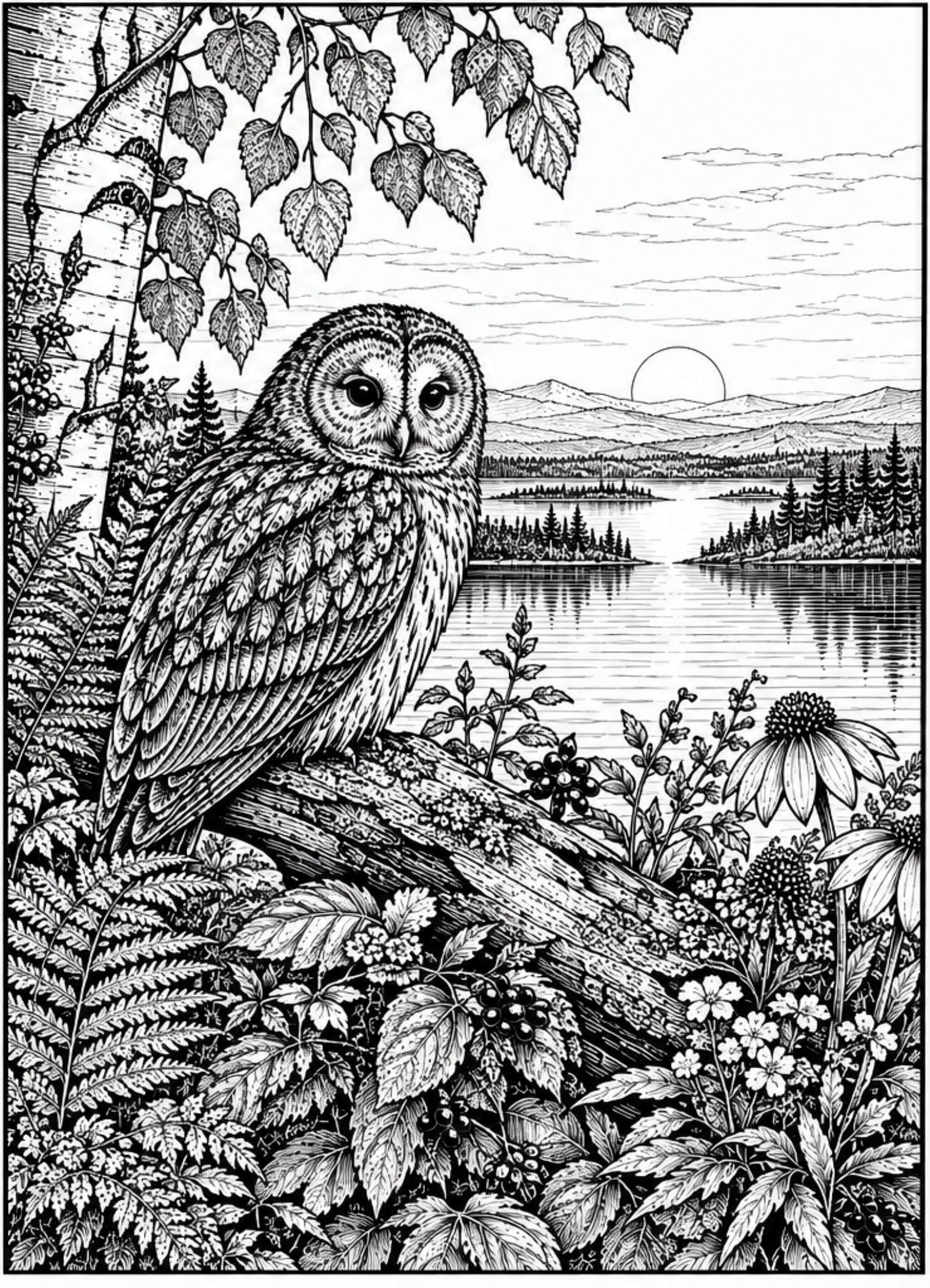
Our nervous systems may need more time to feel safe with new experiences and ways of being. What feels like a small step to others may be a significant step for us.

With compassion, support, and patience, we can build new patterns and create a life that feels more aligned with our needs, values, and hopes.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What is one small step you can take right now that feels supportive for you?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.



CHAPTER 9

THE POWER OF YOUR STORY



Your Story Matters

Your story is not just what happened to you. It includes how you survived, what you learned, what you value, and who you are becoming.

Trauma can make us feel like our story is broken, shameful, or not worth sharing. But your story is not a problem to be fixed — it's a part of who you are. It holds strength, resilience, and wisdom.

You get to decide what to share, with whom, and when. Your story can be a source of healing, connection, and even purpose — if and when you choose.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Your story is valid, even when it's hard to tell.
- You are not defined by your trauma.
- You can share your story in small pieces, or not at all.
- Your perspective matters.
- Your story can help you heal and inspire others, if and when you choose.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Your story is not just about what happened, but also about how you made sense of it, how you adapted, and what helped you survive.

Trauma can make it difficult to trust your own memories or to feel that your experiences matter. Over time, with support, we can reconnect with our truths and find our voice again.

Sharing your story is a personal choice. It can be empowering, healing, and a way to help others — but it's not required for your recovery.

You are the author of your story, and you get to decide how it's told.



A GENTLE INVITATION

What is a part of your story that you're proud of? What is one thing you want to remember about your strength?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





CHAPTER 11

MAKING SPACE FOR JOY



Joy Belongs Here, Too

Healing is important, and so is joy. Both can exist together. Making space for joy is not about ignoring difficult experiences or pretending everything is okay. It's about remembering that there is more to life than pain and survival.

Joy can show up in many forms—curiosity, creativity, pleasure, connection, humor, time in nature, good food, music, movement, and moments that simply feel good.

For people who have experienced trauma, joy may sometimes feel unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or even unavailable. That can make sense. When we have been focused on staying safe, it can be hard to notice or trust positive experiences.

Rediscovering joy can be a gentle and important part of healing. We can start small, notice what feels good, and allow more joy into our lives, one moment at a time.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Joy and healing can exist together.
- Small moments of joy can make a big difference.
- Joy can look different for everyone.
- It's okay if joy feels unfamiliar or uncomfortable at first.
- You deserve experiences that feel good.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Joy is not frivolous or selfish. It is a natural and important part of being human.

Trauma can affect our ability to feel pleasure, curiosity, and connection. It may take time to rebuild a sense of joy, and that is okay.

Finding joy doesn't mean our pain wasn't real. It means we are creating space for more of what we want in our lives.

Joy can support our healing by helping us build resilience, regulate our nervous system, and strengthen our sense of hope and possibility.

A GENTLE INVITATION



What brings you joy?
What is one small way you can invite more joy into your life?



You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.


curiosity guides me
different paths are still forward
I can choose my next step
N
NE
E
SE
S
SW
W
NW

CHAPTER 12

LEARNING TO TRUST YOURSELF

Your Voice Matters



Trauma can sometimes leave us questioning our perceptions, decisions, and instincts. When our experiences or needs have been dismissed, we may learn to doubt ourselves or rely heavily on others to tell us what is right.

Rebuilding self-trust doesn't mean always knowing the answer or never making mistakes. It means developing a relationship with ourselves that includes curiosity, patience, and respect.

Self-trust can grow through small experiences: noticing a preference, making a choice, recognizing a need, or allowing ourselves to change our minds.

You don't have to know exactly where you're going to begin trusting your ability to find your way. Each experience, even the uncertain ones, can teach us something about ourselves.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Your preferences and needs deserve consideration.
- You can ask for guidance while still making your own decisions.
- Making mistakes doesn't mean you cannot trust yourself.
- You are allowed to reconsider a choice.
- Self-trust can develop gradually.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Many people who have experienced trauma have had their perceptions, feelings, or decisions dismissed, minimized, or ignored.

This can make it difficult to trust our own instincts or believe that our needs matter.

Learning to trust yourself can be a way of reclaiming your voice and your agency.

Self-trust is not about always being right. It's about listening to yourself with curiosity, respect, and compassion, even when the path is uncertain.



A GENTLE INVITATION

What is one small way you could honor your own preferences today?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.




NATURE
HEALING
GOOD FOOD
CREATIVE LIFE
BRIGHTER DAYS

CHAPTER 13

REST IS PART OF HEALING



You Are Allowed to Rest

When we've experienced prolonged stress or trauma, slowing down can sometimes feel uncomfortable. Our nervous systems may have learned to associate staying busy, alert, or prepared with staying safe.

Rest isn't always easy, and it doesn't look the same for everyone. Some people find stillness restorative, while others feel more comfortable with gentle movement, creative activities, or quiet companionship.

Rest doesn't need to be earned. It is a basic human need.

Rest is not necessarily the same as relaxation. Sometimes rest simply means reducing demands, allowing ourselves a break, or choosing an activity that requires less effort.

Giving ourselves permission to rest can support our physical health, emotional well-being, and nervous system regulation. Rest can help us feel more present, grounded, and able to care for ourselves and others.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Rest is a need, not a reward.
- You don't have to be productive to have value.
- Rest can be active or quiet.
- It's okay if slowing down feels unfamiliar.
- You can discover what restorative experiences work for you.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Many people who have experienced trauma have learned to stay busy, alert, or prepared as a way to feel safe. This can make it difficult to slow down or take a break.

Rest is not laziness, and it is not a sign of weakness. It is a natural and important part of healing.

Rest can look different for everyone. It might include sleep, quiet time, time in nature, creative activities, gentle movement, or simply doing less.

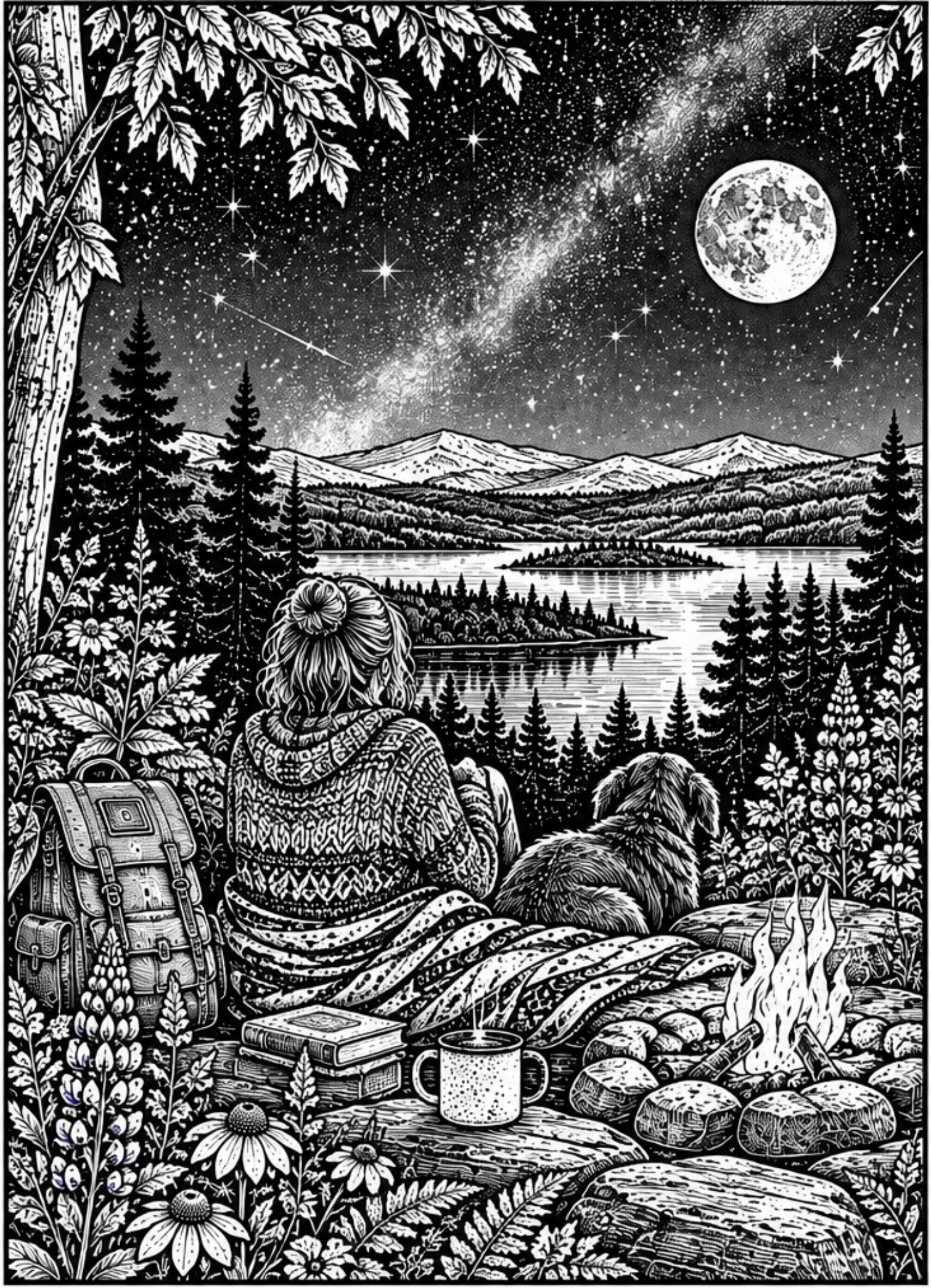
When we allow ourselves to rest, we can support our nervous system, feel more balanced, and create space for healing, connection, and the things that matter most to us.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What does rest look like for you when you don't have to meet anyone else's expectations?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.







A Future That Feels Possible

Our past experiences are part of our story, but they do not have to define our future. We are more than what happened to us. We are also the choices we make, the values we live by, and the person we are becoming.

It can be hard to imagine a different future, especially when we have been focused on surviving. Trauma can make it difficult to see possibilities, and our nervous system may keep us focused on what feels familiar, even when it is painful.

As we build safety, develop new skills, and experience support, it can become easier to imagine and move toward a life that feels meaningful and aligned with our values. A hopeful future does not mean that everything will be perfect. It means that change is possible, and that we can continue to grow, heal, and create a life that feels good to us.

You get to decide what you want your future to look like. There is no right timeline, and it is never too late to set new goals, try new things, or dream again.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- You are more than your trauma, your diagnosis, or your past.
- It is possible to create a future that feels meaningful to you.
- Your goals can be big or small.
- Change can happen at any stage of life.
- Hope and realism can exist together.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Many people who have experienced trauma have had to focus on survival for a long time. This can make it difficult to imagine a different future.

It is common to feel uncertain about what we want or to have a hard time trusting that positive change is possible.

As we experience safety, support, and new opportunities, our ability to imagine and plan for the future can grow.

We get to define what a meaningful life looks like for us. It might include relationships, creativity, work, time in nature, helping others, learning new skills, or simply feeling more at peace in our daily life.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What do you hope for in your future?
What is one small step you could take in that direction?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.



CHAPTER 15

IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP



You Don't Have to Carry Everything Alone

Human beings are not meant to do life alone. We are wired for connection. Having supportive relationships can help us manage stress, explore difficult emotions, and feel less isolated. Sometimes another person's calm presence can help our nervous system settle. This is called co-regulation.

When we've experienced trauma, asking for help can feel difficult. We may have learned that our needs would be ignored, that depending on others wasn't safe, or that we had to take care of everything ourselves.

But needing support is not a weakness. It's a normal and healthy part of being human. Receiving support can help us heal, build resilience, and create a greater sense of belonging.

Support can look different for everyone. It might be a trusted friend, a family member, a peer in recovery, a counselor, a support group, a spiritual community, a beloved pet, or time in nature.

As we build safety and trust, we may find that allowing ourselves to receive support becomes easier. We can honor both our independence and our need for connection. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not a loss of autonomy.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Needing support is a normal part of being human.
- Asking for help can take courage.
- Support can look like listening, practical assistance, companionship, or simply being present.
- You get to decide whom you trust and what you share.
- Independence and connection can exist together.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Many people who have experienced trauma have learned to rely only on themselves. This can be a way our nervous system tries to stay safe when our needs weren't met in the past.

While self-reliance can be an important strength, it can also lead to isolation, exhaustion, and feeling overwhelmed.

Healthy relationships offer opportunities for co-regulation—when another person's calm, supportive presence helps our nervous system feel more settled.

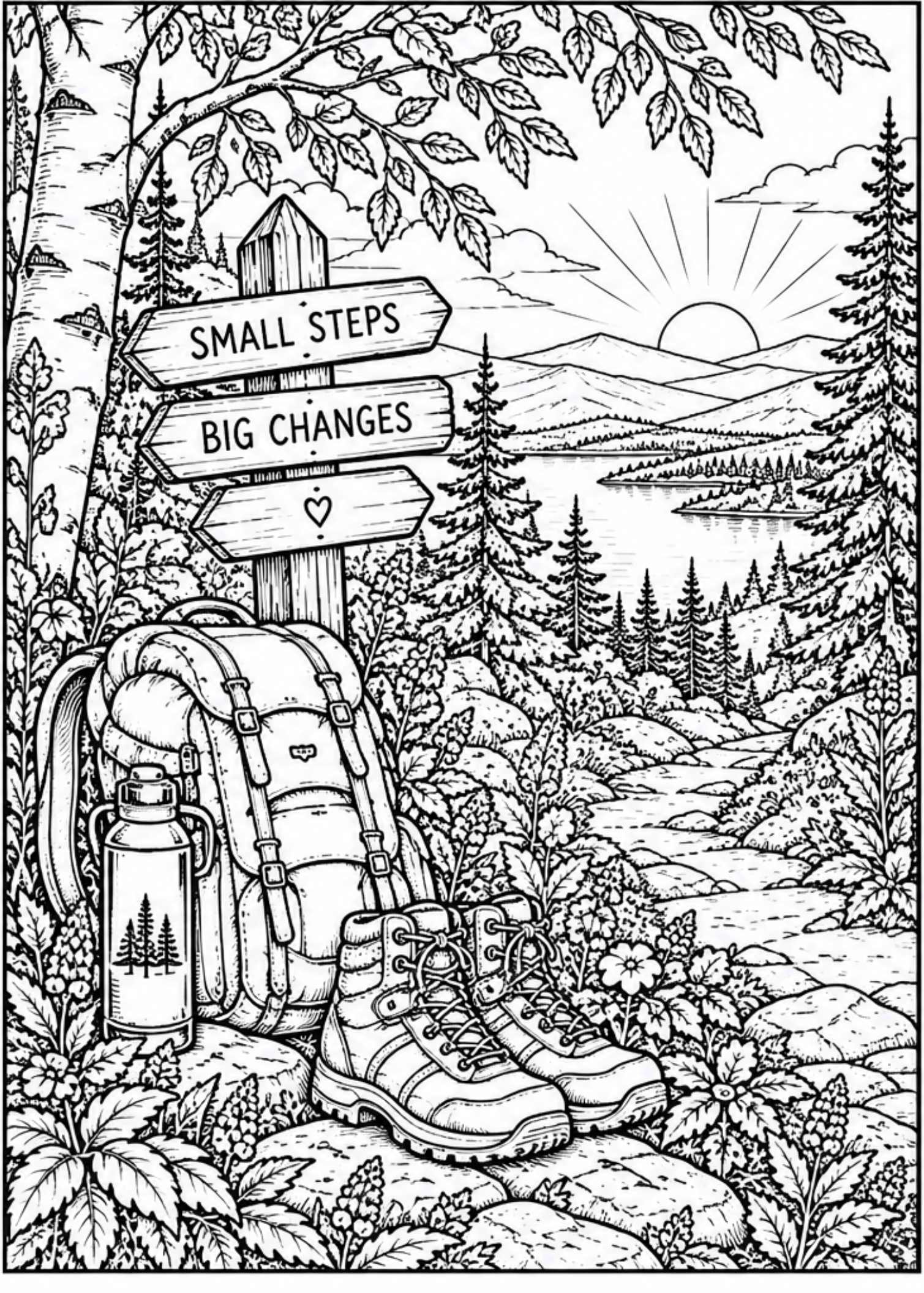
Receiving support doesn't mean giving up your independence. It means recognizing that you are worthy of care, connection, and belonging, just as you are.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What kind of support feels helpful to you?
Is there someone you feel comfortable asking?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.




SMALL STEPS
BIG CHANGES

Progress Looks Different for Everyone

Change doesn't always happen all at once. Healing and growth often take time, and they rarely follow a straight line. Some days may feel easier than others. That's normal.

Small steps can still lead to big changes. Each step, no matter how small, matters. Progress isn't about perfection—it's about moving forward in a way that feels right for you.

Your journey is your own. You get to decide what progress looks like, how fast you want to go, and what feels meaningful and sustainable.

Celebrating small wins can help build confidence, strengthen motivation, and remind you of how far you've come.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Progress doesn't have to be big to be real.
- You can go at your own pace.
- Setbacks are part of the process, not a failure.
- What works for someone else may not work for you.
- You are allowed to change your mind and adjust your path.
- You're doing better than you think.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

For many people who have experienced trauma, progress can feel uncertain. Past experiences may have taught us that change is unsafe, unreliable, or out of our control.

Healing is not about rushing. It's about creating safety, building trust with yourself, and allowing space for growth.

Progress can be messy, nonlinear, and sometimes invisible to others. What matters most is that you keep showing up for yourself.

You are not behind. You are on your own path, and that path is valid.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What is one small step you can take today that feels like progress for you?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





A Life That Feels Good to You

Healing is not just about surviving difficult experiences. It is also about making space for the things that bring meaning, joy, and a sense of aliveness to our lives.

After trauma, it can feel challenging to reconnect with what we enjoy or what matters to us. We may feel like we are simply getting through each day, with little energy left for anything else. That is a normal response. Our nervous system may still be focused on staying safe, making it harder to notice or prioritize the things that feel good.

Over time, and with support, we can begin to make intentional choices that nurture our well-being. This might include spending time in nature, being creative, learning something new, connecting with people we care about, or simply allowing time to rest.

We do not have to do everything at once. Small, intentional moments can help us create a life that feels more balanced, meaningful, and aligned with our values.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- You deserve to make time for what matters to you.
- Joy and purpose can be part of your healing journey.
- Small, consistent steps can make a difference.
- It's okay to rediscover what you enjoy.
- Your needs and values are valid and important.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Many people who have experienced trauma have had to focus so much on survival that their own needs, interests, and joys were put aside.

It can take time to reconnect with what feels good, and that is okay. Our nervous system may need support to move from constant alertness toward a greater sense of safety and ease.

Engaging in activities that bring meaning or pleasure can help regulate our nervous system, build resilience, and support our overall well-being.

You are not selfish for taking time to do things that nourish you. A life that includes joy, creativity, connection, and rest is not just possible — it is part of what you deserve.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What are some things that bring you joy or meaning?
What is one small way you could make more room for those things in your life?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.



CHAPTER 18

MAKING PEACE WITH IMPERFECTION



You Don't Have to Get Everything Right

Many of us have learned to be highly responsible, helpful, or self-sufficient as a way to feel safe. For some people, perfectionism develops after experiences where mistakes led to criticism, conflict, or rejection. Doing everything "right" can feel like a way to protect ourselves.

These patterns often make sense in the context of what we've been through. But they can also leave us feeling exhausted, anxious, or afraid to try something new.

Learning to tolerate imperfection isn't about giving up on growth or accountability. It's about recognizing that our worth doesn't depend on flawless performance.

We are allowed to be a work in progress. Mistakes are a natural part of learning, and trying again is a sign of courage, not failure. Life doesn't have to be perfect to be meaningful, and we don't have to do everything at once.

When we give ourselves permission to be human, we can find more joy, creativity, and connection. There is beauty in growth, in the messy middle, and in the unique path we each take.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Making mistakes is a normal part of learning.
- You can have high standards without demanding perfection.
- Your value isn't determined by your productivity or accomplishments.
- It's okay to be a beginner.
- Growth can happen through experimentation, play, and trying again.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Perfectionism can sometimes function as a protective strategy. It may have helped you stay safe, avoid criticism, or feel more in control in difficult situations.

While perfectionism can offer a sense of security, it can also lead to stress, self-criticism, and fear of mistakes.

Approaching perfectionism with curiosity rather than judgment can help you recognize when it serves you and when you might want to try something different.

You deserve compassion as you explore new ways of being—ones that make room for both growth and grace.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What is something you might enjoy trying if you didn't have to do it perfectly?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.







There Is More to You Than Survival

Trauma can influence how we see ourselves. Sometimes we become so focused on our struggles, mistakes, or the things we want to change that we overlook the qualities that have helped us navigate difficult experiences.

Strength doesn't always look like courage or confidence. Sometimes it looks like asking for help, recognizing a need, setting a boundary, being creative, or trying something unfamiliar.

The survival strategies we've developed often made sense in the context of what we were going through. We can appreciate our resourcefulness without believing that suffering was necessary to make us strong.

You have already shown incredible strength by being here. The fact that you are still here today is a testament to your resilience, determination, and capacity to adapt.

As you continue on your healing journey, you can begin to recognize the many strengths that have helped you get this far. These strengths are still with you, and they can continue to support you as you create the life you want now.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Strength can be quiet and difficult to recognize.
- Survival strategies may have helped you through challenging circumstances.
- You can appreciate your strengths while learning new skills.
- Being vulnerable and receiving support can require courage.
- You are more than the challenges you've experienced.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Resilience is not simply an individual trait. It is influenced by relationships, opportunities, resources, and circumstances.

Many people who have experienced trauma have developed remarkable resourcefulness, creativity, and adaptability. These qualities helped them survive and continue to serve them today.

Needing support does not mean someone lacks resilience. In fact, reaching out for help can be a powerful expression of strength.

Recognizing your strengths isn't about minimizing what you've been through. It's about honoring your capacity to endure, adapt, and continue growing, even when things felt impossible.



A GENTLE INVITATION

What is one strength you've noticed in yourself, even if it doesn't look like what you once thought strength should be?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.





CHAPTER 20

FINDING YOUR VOICE



You Deserve to Be Heard

Many of us have learned to minimize our needs, keep our thoughts to ourselves, or put others' needs before our own. This can happen for many reasons, including past experiences where our voices were ignored, dismissed, criticized, or met with conflict.

Your voice matters. You have the right to express your thoughts, feelings, needs, and boundaries. Speaking up can feel uncomfortable, especially if it hasn't always felt safe to do so. It may take practice, and that's okay.

Finding your voice isn't about being perfect or always knowing the right words. It's about learning to trust yourself, honoring what feels true for you, and recognizing that your perspective is valuable.

You get to decide how, when, and with whom you share your voice. It's okay to start small. Every time you express yourself, you are practicing self-respect and building trust with yourself and others.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Your thoughts and feelings deserve consideration.
- You can express yourself in different ways—through conversation, writing, art, music, movement, or choices.
- You don't have to explain every decision.
- You have the right to decide what you share.
- Being heard begins with having opportunities to express yourself safely.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Silence can sometimes be a protective response. It may have helped you stay safe, avoid conflict, or manage difficult situations in the past.

Many people who have experienced trauma have learned to be quiet, people-please, or avoid conflict as a way to cope. These patterns often made sense in the context of what we were going through.

Having a voice also means having the right to privacy. You should never be pressured to disclose painful experiences as proof of healing.

Finding your voice is about recognizing that your thoughts, feelings, needs, and perspective matter—and that you deserve to be heard with respect, compassion, and curiosity.

A GENTLE INVITATION

What is something you wish others understood about you?
How might you express it in a way that feels comfortable?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.




EXPLORE
CREATE
LEARN
GROW
BELONG
SLOW
PRESENT
CURIOUS
KIND
ENOUGH
SUNFLOWER
BEANS
SQUASH

CHAPTER 21

CREATING YOUR OWN MEANING



You Get to Decide What Matters

Trauma and substance use can sometimes become such significant parts of our experiences that we begin to define ourselves by them. But we are more than our histories, diagnoses, struggles, or the roles we've played in other people's lives.

Recovery can offer opportunities to rediscover our interests, explore our values, develop relationships, and imagine possibilities for ourselves. Meaning doesn't have to come from a grand purpose. It might be found in creativity, caring for animals, spending time outdoors, learning something new, or contributing to a community.

It's okay if you're not sure what matters to you yet. Discovery takes time. You might be surprised by what brings you joy, curiosity, or a sense of connection. Small experiences can help you learn more about yourself and what feels meaningful.

You get to decide what matters. Your life can include many different things, and it can continue to evolve as you grow.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Your past is part of your story, but it doesn't define your entire identity.
- You can discover new interests at any age.
- Your values can change as you grow.
- Meaning can be found in ordinary moments.
- You get to decide what matters to you.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Healing doesn't require finding a positive meaning in painful experiences. Nobody needs to believe that trauma happened for a reason.

We can acknowledge that difficult things happened while also choosing what gives our lives meaning today.

Meaning looks different for everyone. It can include big dreams or simple pleasures. There is no right or wrong way to create a life that feels meaningful to you.

Your interests, values, and sense of purpose may change over time, and that's a normal part of growth. What matters most is that you get to decide what feels right for your life.



A GENTLE INVITATION

What activities, relationships, places, or experiences help you feel most like yourself?

You can write, draw, or simply notice. There is no right or wrong answer.

