

RECOVERY FOUNDATIONS

chapter four

RECOVERY PROTECTION

Preserving your progress, especially when it is slower than slow, is vital to your continued future recovery success. Should you be unable to set boundaries then your recovery will become very bumpy and you will slow yourself down. With permission from someone else who has done this all for themselves, I encourage you to gift yourself with the permission you may need to now do this too!

This chapter contains pre-drafted letters that one may use to communicate specific needs to their loved ones and friends. Without clear communication of boundaries, the boundaries cannot exist - *you are responsible for their creation.*

We must communicate

boundaries into existence

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Manifest your world by

speaking it into a reality that you

built and therefore, *must own!*

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SAFETY, WHAT IS IT AND WHERE DO I FIND IT?



Safety means different things to different people, some find it in good company, others in their isolation. First things first, don't let anybody judge what YOU NEED! Should you need weeks, months, even a year or two in bed, do it! Treat it as a phase though, not the final destination. Your body will tell you when it's ready to start moving it again...

I tried, many times, to return to my yoga practice during my 'resting phase' of recovery. Every time I knelt on the floor, I'd just start crying my eyes out. For a time I kept questioning why I was so weak, why I couldn't just move like I used to... But I was no longer who I used to be... *she died*... And I grieved her death. That woman I used to be was gone, perhaps forever, perhaps not, no one was sure, not in the books, not in the therapy room, not anywhere external... but she was gone, I could just *feel it*.

I missed myself massively, I spent years working on liking her, that woman I became. Before PTSD came for a second time, I had started to play music again (first time since mid-teenage years) and was singing daily, even live in front of a small crowd (*just once).* Now, I was back in bed, crying what felt like *constantly,* and couldn't even manage to brush my teeth in the morning.

I had experienced shock, PTSD came after the shock melted from my body, both experiences were hell. By the time these experiences came for me I had already mastered positioning into The Eye that watches The Self. I could 'notice' everything that was happening, in body, mind and environment, and I noticed it all at once. With so much to see, to lose, to cling to, I felt as though I was losing my mind sometimes.

TIME WOULD MEND ME...

I knew it would mend me.

It HAD to mend me... alas, it did.

Healing takes a lot of growing around scars and grief. There's no sudden day you just wake up feeling better. You may feel like the worst has past for three days, then you get sucker-punched in the gut by a PTSD flashback or a trigger from the environment.

Progress can be made slowly, but what I have come to notice is that regression (or relapse) can happen so quickly that even I miss the warning signs sometimes. Recovery protection is vital to the progress and preservation of your recovery, I cannot tell you what to do, only what I have managed to accomplish by way of instilling boundaries and learning to SAY NO! What you do is always up to you!

THE LOCKED DOOR



A closed door changes lives. You are allowed to claim ONE ROOM in a property that is *all yours.*



You can put a lock on the door, or buy a door wedge. Just be safe!

SAFETY should be the foremost concern a person in recovery has for themselves. Is this place safe? Am I likely to get any surprises? What's coming from behind me? All legitimate questions to ask, especially because your body is constantly asking them for you anyway... all we are doing is bringing them into your conscious awareness.

Trauma comes in many forms, you may not use this word, but if the body remembers it and has to heal from it, it was likely a trauma. Loss, sudden or not, is a trauma. Loss of self, loss of another (to mental health included), loss of an ability or skill, loss of your job, trauma is relative to what a person can endure and reprocess simultaneously.

Reprocessing is something the body and mind do... until they don't need to anymore. My reprocessing journey took 4 years of life, it was worth it, time spent in bed, then therapy, then bed again, then a chair, then eventually, on the floor doing yoga (and without crying).

ISOLATING WAS A BEST & BLESSED PRACTISE...

ISOLATION - WHY THE BAD RAP?



When I would begin to experience active symptoms, I would immediately end up in isolation again. Isolation, for me, was living in one room in a relative's home, rarely leaving said room unless it was for food, drink, or the bathroom. Those living with me knew that I needed the quiet only because I told them...

It did not necessarily suit them because they would talk and be less affected by any dialogue than I. They did not understand the need I was expressing, perhaps they found it strange or odd, but it was definitely what I needed to do for myself. Sometimes they even got angry and took it personally, but with an awareness of The Self and Other I was able to determine that their reaction was nothing to do with me and they had to own it (learn more about 'The Self' and 'The Other' in my book, *Faith, In Stories That Change).*

Moreover, various physiological reactions would come if I tried to leave the house for anything other than food shopping (I knew the food store I would go to, I knew early mornings were the quietest, and I knew what I was going for - it was relatively safe, but I did use breathwork every single time, to calm my hyper-aroused body and mind, and to get through it so that I'd be able to eat that week/fortnight).

THE BLESSING OF THE QUIET



Isolation allowed me to be with my own thoughts and feelings, no one else's, for a time. It was not a choice I was making for life, but one that was essential to moving forward in my recovery journey, one I had no consistent or reliable help with.

Flexibility of this boundary can be welcomed, but it will also blur the lines of silence for those you have to set the boundary with. Break the silence yourself and it gives them permission to do the same.

The best routine that I found was chosen quiet
between Sunday bedtime and Saturday morning.

Those five days were strange at first, both parties smiled in passing, but in a way that said, 'Hey, this is really weird'. This reaction past after a few weeks, until the boundary of my isolation was 'normalised' for us both.

There were lonely weeks, when I'd have 'time-off' from my isolation, it took time to realise that this meant I was ready to start going out, when the isolation became utterly painful and boring. But then, I'd go out once, enjoy it thoroughly, before a return to isolating, with necessity.

DON'T LET IT BE STRANGE... LET IT BE VITAL!



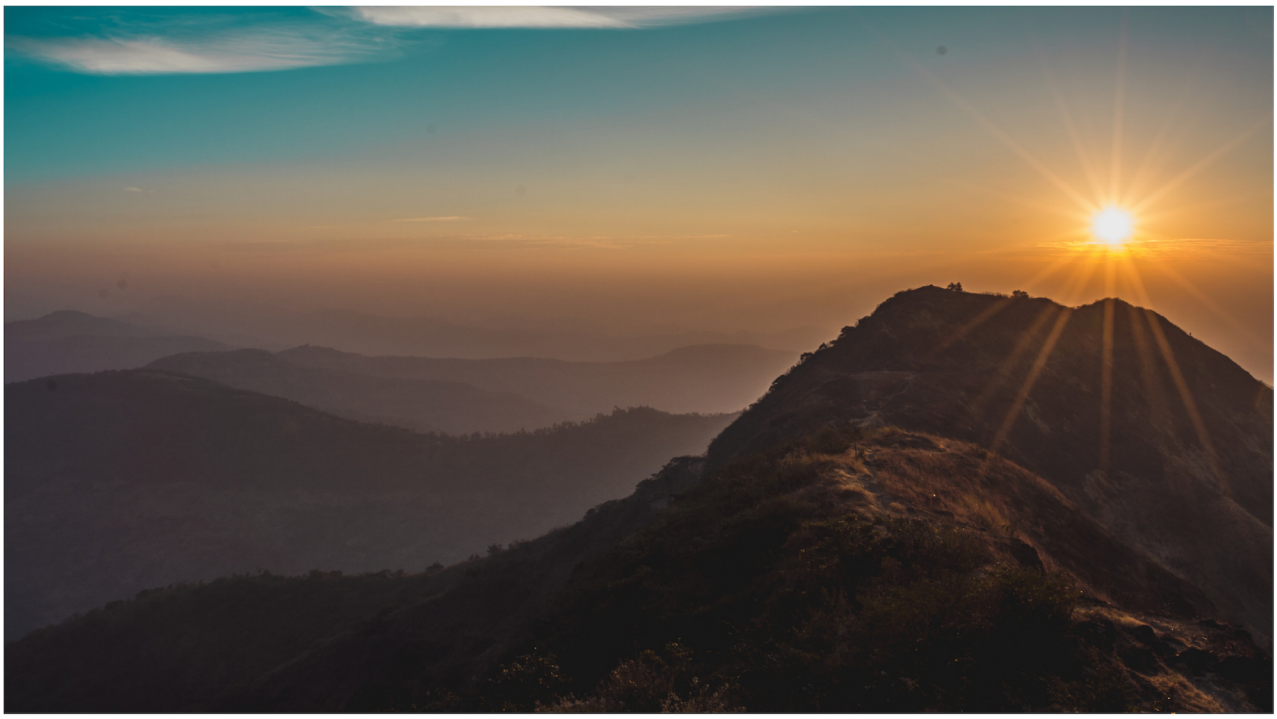
We belong to nature, sit with a tree, by a pond watching the ripples, and people will tell you that you are *meditating*. Visit a silent retreat where they practice yoga daily and you are practicing *spiritual and wellness activities.*

Well, that's what I was doing too, only I was staring into space and time within me instead of looking to an external and beautiful thing. I was a rockstar, there, I said it. I meditated on the pain, I sat with it all and dove into a world of shame, relentless anger, deep sadness and longing.

Silent retreats often see those in attendance trying to manage the stuff rising up from within them. To see 'the stuff' inside is hard and painful, that's why nobody does it naturally or without being forced to. Recovery is a path that forces you to heal within, to unbury yourself. This takes time, a lot of energy, and is very tiring.

So, to the world around you, you may appear to be doing nothing much at all, but anyone who sits in their pain and repurposes it as their path ahead is also an out-right rock star!

ISOLATION AND SPIRITUALITY



Lastly, on the note of self-isolating... I want to remind you that isolating is nothing new, that it is a deeply spiritual and healing practice and that it does not make you a hermit or a recluse! Especially when you acknowledge that any isolation is *serving you*.

When isolation becomes a very long-term lifestyle, sure, agoraphobia should perhaps be investigated, diagnosed and treated with the help of a professional. Yet, when safety is what you are consciously seeking, let the narrative change, let the story you tell about it change - to others too. You never know, you may well grant permission to another who is in need of adopting isolation practices themselves.

Sharing our stories helps to guide others along the path back towards the light. Considering that the light is inside of you, not in the face of another or in the touch of a friend, find hope and strength that isolation will serve you in some way *if* you feel drawn to it as an experience. It truly is just a temporary experience, much like everything else in life.

enjoy the tranquillity

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peace be with you...

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life is allowed to be quiet

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stop talking

seek inward

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Meditate on the pain,

watch it come and go.

This too, shall pass...

eventually...

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SO, THAT LOCKED DOOR?



We lock our front doors at night, and even in the day, *for a reason*, and that reason is to feel safe. But what if your trauma has made the entire world unsafe, including your relatives and friends? What if your body and mind, affected by trauma as they have become, don't understand what is safe or unsafe and you are trapped in a perpetual cycle of triggering?

LOCK THE DOOR! It is perfectly okay to lock the door. Some people live in homes with parents and siblings who have no boundaries of their own, and so they are unable to respect yours without being asked to. With someone just walking into your room while you're crying, or meditating, or dancing because it's a good day, it can close you off from repeating that experience for yourself... alone in your room.

Taking away any element of surprise will only heal you and do you good in the long run. By placing a door stop beneath the door (if it opens inwards) you immediately protect yourself from interruptions in your lifestyle. Should you have an outwards opening door, put a latch on the door, a good one, and make sure it is okay with the home owner before you do.

LETTERS TO HELP YOU COMMUNICATE

I have devised a few letters for you to help install, reinforce and protect the boundaries you choose to set for yourself. Communicating with family, especially if what you're trying to recover from was a shared experience, can be challenging, dangerous, or simply a bit scary because it's something new you're attempting. Being afraid of something or anxious about it does not mean you shouldn't be doing it, it just means it's unusual to you and requires practice.

Letters included are:

- Requesting a locked bedroom door (it may be your office, the living room, any room is fine, but bedrooms work well because they have a nest waiting for you, aka your warm, soft, cosy, lovely bed.
- A request for silence (*you* choose the periods of time).
- Topics that are OFF THE TABLE - this letter reinforces that some topics are SAFE, while others cause you pain, in the case of emotional pain, this can also be very visceral and prominently felt in the body. Pain is pain people - should you have a broken collar bone and your family and friends kept poking at it they'd be committing assault. Although invisible, your emotional and cognitive bodies are just as wounded, and words poke at these wounds, you are allowed to PROTECT YOURSELF from the world, *especially* if it doesn't understand you. Setting a boundary around content is all we are talking about here.

The pages that follow are only drafts of letters, you can use them as is - my thought is that this is less-confronting for your recipients because they cannot take MY WORDS personally, I don't know them, after all. However, should you want to personalise the content, I have included a word document in the *Recovery Foundations* downloads, it includes all three letters and you can adapt them as you wish. Otherwise, just add the recipients name and your own to these letters, perhaps with a short handwritten thank you at the end, and send it. DON'T BE TOO SCARED TO SEND IT!

A LETTER FOR A LOCKED DOOR

A LITTLE ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FORM OF AFFIRMATIONS

I deserve to feel safe.

I am allowed to have needs and speak them into existence.

Boundaries are safe and healthy,
the more I practice them, the safer and healthier I will become.

When other people react, those emotions are theirs to carry,
I am allowed to keep myself safe and walk away.

Speaking my needs aloud or in writing is strong.
I AM STRONG.

Resilience can only get me so far, I now also choose to love myself.
I am committed to loving myself, and thus, to getting well.

Dear _____,

As you know, I am currently struggling with my mental and emotional health. I am trying really hard to get well, but it is taking far longer than I expected. I have been working through a recovery support programme and it recommends that I live with a locked isolation-room door, which is why I write to you today.

Ana Maria Santuario designed this programme and wrote this letter to support me towards expressing what she calls 'a vital need'. She explains why a locked door is important here:

- Your loved one needs a different sense of safety to you, they need a space they know no one can enter when they are 'home', resting and trying to recover. They need no 'surprises' injected into their days right now.
- Treating this locked door like a front door is essential, they can pretend to not be home if they want; or better yet, you may never knock, if that is what they need and explicitly ask for. Knocking can cause massive waves of terror to rise and fall within the body, it is just residue of shock and trauma.
- Texting can be a happy middle ground to use for daily communications that may be required.
- Your loved one is experiencing something you may not be able to understand, but they have spoken this need in this way because it is vital to their recovery.
- It is not a decision you should take personally, it really isn't. When treating and recovering from complex mental health illnesses, a person needs subconscious reassurances of their safety, and this locked door is one of them. By eliminating, or at least minimising, interruptions to their recovery journey, you can hope to see them get well a lot sooner than they would without such healthy and safe-making boundaries in place.
- The lock needs to be keyless and to only work from the inside. Should this scare you because of suicide risks that are apparent to you, then a chain lock would be fine, one you can cut (with bolt cutters) that you should buy. Just because of a high risk, do not ignore this need, *adapt to it,* because the need for safety is likely even more vital in this case.
- I hope that you can respect and support this expressed need of your loved one, their recovery may very well depend on it.

Thanks for listening to me in this way. Sending this letter makes it so much easier to speak my needs, and I do hope that you will support me towards getting better by helping me put a lock on my door this coming weekend.

_____

A LETTER FOR SILENT PRACTICE

A LITTLE ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FORM OF AFFIRMATIONS

To be quiet is to be with myself, and I am not scared of myself.
I own who and what I am, and am ready to work from there.

In the silence I see myself more clearly.

I am so brave for choosing to sit
with myself during this chapter of life.

Distraction is easier.
I choose the hard way, the way to freedom, I CHOOSE SILENCE.

I am allowed to be quiet in this busy, noisy world.

It is safe to be quiet, so very safe. I am safe with myself.

Dear _____,

As you know, I am currently struggling with my mental and emotional health. I am trying really hard to get well, but it is taking far longer than I expected. I have been working through a recovery support programme and it recommends that I live in periods of silence every week, which is why I write to you today.

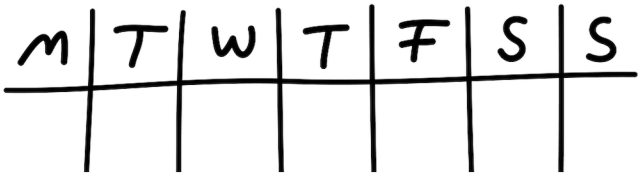
Ana Maria Santuario designed this programme and wrote this letter to support me towards expressing what she calls 'a vital need'. She explains why periods of silence, or quiet, are important here:

- Everybody is very different, some people like the crowds, others enjoy time alone in nature, some thrive in isolation, some people change what they like and adapt rather easily. Your loved one has identified their need for the safety found in silence with themselves. It is likely that they have a very busy mind right now, with too many thoughts churning, and so, when you or someone else speaks to them, it creates an unbearable level of cognitive distress. This is not your fault, they are struggling to manage some very volatile physiological and mental distress signals, and by minimising them with silent practices they may very well reprocess what they need to before welcoming more regular interactions eventually, when they feel ready to.
- Silence may feel weird initially, but I say to you, *welcome it,* you get a break too, from watching what you say, from worrying because of something your loved one has said, and from trying to 'fix' a problem that does not need fixing. Your loved one can be well again, with systematic recovery steps. Should they request this silence then it is paramount that you find a deep resounding respect for their bravery because it means they are diving into painful emotions and perhaps memories that are very hard to re-experience. They deserve your respect and cooperation, not *your* unhealthy reactions to this letter.
- Please do not use words like hermit or recluse, please do not create judgements about what they have chosen to do, because what they are choosing right now is to try anything and everything to get well.
- **There are posters I have made as reminders to everyone in a shared home, please encourage their placement to be in the kitchen, on the bedroom (or other room) door. Please allow this recovery to be a thing that is lived safely under the same roof as you.**
- Initially, this practice may be experimental, or maybe something in life happens that requires everyone's attention, that is okay. But for the most part, let your loved one breach silence, it is their right, especially if you are not in

need of it like they are. Allowing them to reach out when they are able can be rewarding for you too, as you can mark their progress within such interactions.

- Silence is a meditative practice, monks do it, nuns and priests, it is a common Hindu practice too. Silence is not unhealthy, unsafe or strange, *it is a choice.*
- Some people go to silent retreats to seek inwards, when they do, fairly often they discover pain. This is neither the beginning or the end of your loved one's recovery journey, it is just a necessary phase, one they may choose to return to intermittently.
- During my own recovery journey I chose to remain silent between Sunday bedtime and Saturday morning. I tried Sunday night to Sunday morning but it was too long. A routine is a good idea, that way everyone knows what is expected of them on given days.
- On the days when you can talk, please do not bombard your loved one with horror stories from the news, or an 'air-off' of all the stressful events from your week, this will immediately make them retreat back into silence. Share a few happier stories, or practical ones, do not rely on them to be your therapist on the days when you can talk to one another, it is not conducive to their recovery, or yours... where you 'rant' a bit, find a healthy outlet for yourself, in this way, the silence will have served you too because you will have come to notice that you need someone to talk to about 'all the bad stuff' regularly. Seek counselling, therapy, or try keeping a journal.
- Preserving and protecting recovery progress is all we are doing, and you can either be a great and respectful help to your loved one, or a hinderance that causes relapse, regression, and a failed recovery attempt.

Your loved one has chosen these days for silence, and has marked their silent periods clearly:



***Silent days have been marked clearly here.**

Should they only request silence during the day but will speak to you at dinnertime, let that become a discussion had, this is all about *individual needs* being met. I can only tell my story and let it inspire others towards the discovery of what a safe recovery pathway looks like for them. Now I will hand you back over to your loved one, who has a few more things left to say...

I want to say thank you, for accepting that I have a story I am living and that this journey demands certain choices to be made. I am grateful for your cooperation and patience. I know a better life waits for me in my future somewhere and I can only keep faith that, with the right steps laid before me, I can and will come to live a better quality of life - the kind of life I know that I am deserving of. I hope you can see how hard I am trying, I am not lazy, unaccomplished or boring, I am busy recovering, which requires A LOT OF INVISIBLE WORK to be carried out.

I live this journey alone inside of my body and mind, but I do appreciate that it must have impacted you as well, so I am also sorry that you have to experience whatever you are experiencing too. I hope we can enjoy better days together in the years to come.

A LETTER FOR MINDFUL DIALOG CONTENT

A LITTLE ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FORM OF AFFIRMATIONS

What I absorb will impact and change how I feel.
I am allowed to feel safe in my body and mind.

Safety is found in CHOOSING what I take in through my senses.

Mindfulness takes time to develop,
I must give myself time, and others too.

I am allowed to choose the stories that I listen to.

I am no one's energetic rubbish bin. If they have negative stories to tell, I am not the vessel they can pour them in to.

I AM ALLOWED TO SAY NO TO THE WORLD!

Dear _____,

As you know, I am currently struggling with my mental and emotional health. I am trying really hard to get well, but it is taking far longer than I expected. I have been working through a recovery support programme and it recommends that I only engage is conversations that support a recovery effort, which is why I write to you today.

Ana Maria Santuario designed this programme and wrote this letter to support me towards expressing what she calls 'a vital need'. She explains why mindful conversations are important here:

- The world is full of so much sadness, fear and grief, some of the weighted feelings your loved one is experiencing daily. Sometimes the body needs to release the sadness. Just because your loved one is crying a lot, it does not necessarily mean they are 'depressed', so to say, perhaps they experienced something really *depressing,* something so sad that they need to cry for a few months - or longer. Please do not be scared of this person's need to *feel their feelings.* Feelings are natural, they are not wrong in any way... if they were wrong would we be born with them?
- Mental health is 'new', but it's always been there, the world just told different stories about it, much was repressed. Should you be someone who does not feel their feelings strongly, or at all, your loved one's recovery journey may not make a lot of sense to you. They may appear weak or in need of medicating. Don't get me wrong, there is space in the world for the right and safe pharmaceuticals, but there is nothing wrong with the body and mind when they are reprocessing something painful.
- Suffering can also be expressed through rage, hateful outbursts and even physical expressions of violence. Anytime anybody reacts from such a place, it is only ever fear and pain talking... This is why we must protect ourselves, *together,* from causing more hurt in one another.
- With mindful awareness, we are able to structure conversation content *safely.* Do you like to rehash the news, the worst of the worst that is happening in the world? Are you hooked into conspiracies and researching down the rabbit hole and you just want to share something you find very interesting? Are you perhaps in pain too but have not yet come to recognise it, and so you throw it with nasty words? Are you complaining all of the time about the same things? Well, everything on this list is *harmful to the listener.*

- I encourage both parties to make a list of 'safe content', it could be television shows and films, perhaps fine art, music, or exercise regimes. Perhaps you come to structure your dialogic content around the basic needs and only speak of good food, exercise prospects, the pet in the residence, and your latest massage or acupuncture session. To talk of positive things means sharing in a positive engagement. To talk of toxic social media content and wake up to such shared misery as The news is tiring... and pretty boring too. Try to stick to your lists, the common ground, the easy, light, non-triggering things that make you feel good things on the inside (you can use the resource on p.27).
- Every recovery requires positivity in the people you see. Should your loved one need to share but they need you not to, this is a thing to tread together, it depends how supportive you choose to be and whether this pattern is save and serves you in any way. Should you not want to hear it at all, encourage them to see a counsellor or therapist, or to learn to write it down, paint it out, or pray on it. Just because your loved one requires this, it does not mean talking becomes a one-way street, *you must set your boundaries here too*, which is why the list must be structured together!
- Initially, there will be an adjustment period, wherein it *has* to be okay to say the wrong thing and for the other person to react and re-establish this boundary. A change like this takes time. While creating boundaries we are still learning and experimenting, neither party will get it right in every moment and this must be okay. Yet, it does not permit either party to abuse this forgiveness cycle, for that is not respectful or appropriate.
- Please make this work for you too, if anything, it will create a sound foundation of love and respect between you. Doing what a person needs is only ever about 'boundary setting', a boundary separates two entities, allowing it to can be challenging - *let it be*... change waits for your loved one on the other side.

Thank you for working with me to re-establish safety on a psychological level. I am struggling to manage my internal anxieties, flash backs, and waves of suffering, and I need this to be how we communicate for the foreseeable future. Truly, thank you for the gift of safe conversations, it makes it easier to settle into good conversation with you.

A LETTER FOR MINDFUL DIALOG CONTENT

Start with 6 shared agreements for SHARED topics,
you're both living through the dialogue, after all.

TELLING FRIENDS WHAT'S GOING ON



Not everyone can handle your stories. Not only that, people may be triggered by them. Everyone has pain. *Everyone*. Let people keep their pain for the time being, you likely have enough to carry. Carry your own too, therapists are equipped to help you, unqualified listeners may harm progress made and easily trigger unnecessary relapse.

Forgive people who respond poorly or with triggering content, horror stories of their own, or who mindlessly share the worst stories from folk they know. *Please do not share other people's stories as though they are yours to tell, people get hurt that way. Also, they belong to someone else, a person who trusted you with their inward secrets.

Sometimes you need to let the world go for a while if experience has determined there is a road you must walk alone, or as separate from 'the norm'. When your pain surfaces too rapidly because the world is triggering and too unpredictable to tolerate for a while you may need to retreat, let that be a fine thing to do when it's necessary.

To avoid falling out with needy people, or those who think mental health isn't really a thing, try communicating with simplicity and in a succinct manner. Many people you expect to care, just won't, let this be okay. You don't need those people, you need the ones who uplift and accept.

HEALTHY AND SAFE TEXT MESSAGES

Keep it SAFE. Never over-share; don't assume the person on the other end of your message hasn't got anything stressful or chaotic going on; keep it succinct; don't over-apologise, you're allowed to be where you're at - say you're sorry when there's something to be sorry for, and say it *once,* not over and over again, forgiveness will be the other person's duty to fulfil.

Use these exact words or create your own versions on the next page, just be prepared to communicate when you need to. Do protect yourself from over-exposure of your stories which can lead to increased and unsafe levels of vulnerability, shame, fight-flight-freeze responses, short or long-term dissociation, as well as mixed anxiety and panic. These responses are *predictable* in me... look to see whether they are in you too...

- Hi there, I am keeping well enough, thank you. Life has been challenging and I am just resting and recovering from a difficult time. Keeping life quiet for now, so I won't be coming out for the time being. How are you?
- Hey you, how have you been? Are you keeping busy these days? I've been recovering from a few hard years, but am making progress and doing okay, thankfully. So good to hear from you.
- Things are okay, I'm just surviving each day for now, can't do much else. Are you okay in life?
- That sounds great, good for you. Are you happy?

People like to hear you're doing okay-ish, not too many people want to know your horror stories, but maybe you have good friends who do - *count yourself lucky and be thankful for them.* When you connect with the world, don't expect it to see, know or validate your pain. Your pain is on the inside, it is invisible, unless you speak it into a shared conversation, which just isn't always a safe thing to do. Many people respond with their pain when you share your own - a good therapist never does this. NEVER!

Be mindful of who you share your truth with. When pain separates you from the world around you it can feel pretty scary. The isolation is immensely separating and some of you may suddenly feel that you have no place in the world. Reintegrating that pain is the process required, after that you can find your footing on the earth after being transformed by your own suffering.

PREPARATION LEADS TO SELF-PROTECTION

Here you can draft and rehearse responses to questions that feel particularly intrusive, or create 'reach out phrases' you can send to friends or family members you are CHOOSING to try to connect with. Remember, short and sweet, no storytelling - if you want to tell your worst stories, go to a treatment space, could even be a life coach, recovery coach or breathwork coach. Damaging relationships with oversharing is a real possibility, try to keep yourself safe within an awareness of your own communication patterns and any tendencies that belong to you...

TRUST THAT EVERY STEP COUNTS,

ESPECIALLY THE HARD ONES...

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