

Rebuilding Strength: Small Steps for Self-Empowerment

Introduction

Healing after abuse—whether emotional, physical, or narcissistic—takes time, patience, and small, intentional actions. This 4-page worksheet is designed to help you rebuild your sense of safety, strength, and self-worth through manageable, empowering steps. After difficult experiences, even the simplest activities can make a profound difference in feeling more like yourself again. Use this resource personally, with a therapist, or as part of a support network to navigate your recovery journey. If you feel unsafe or experience ongoing harm, seek immediate help by calling 911, a crisis hotline, or a local shelter (see resources at the end). Healing isn't linear, and this worksheet encourages kindness toward yourself as you take these small, powerful steps toward empowerment.

Section 1: Feeling Good (Even for a Moment)

After abuse, finding moments of joy, comfort, or simple pleasure can rebuild your sense of self and provide relief from overwhelming emotions. This section helps you identify activities that bring you these feelings, no matter how small.

Activities for Joy and Comfort

List 5-10 activities that bring you a sense of joy, comfort, or simple pleasure. Be as specific as possible—think about sensory details, timing, and how they make you feel. These activities should be accessible, safe, and meaningful to you.

- **Prompt:** Write down activities that uplift you, including why they matter and how you'll incorporate them into your routine.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Activity:** Taking a warm bath with lavender-scented bubbles.
 - **Why It Matters:** The warmth and scent calm me, helping me feel safe and relaxed after a stressful day.
 - **How I'll Incorporate It:** I'll schedule a 20-minute bath every Sunday evening, using candles for added peace.
 - **Activity:** Listening to my favorite song, "Happy" by Pharrell Williams.
 - **Why It Matters:** The upbeat tempo lifts my mood and reminds me of happier times.
 - **How I'll Incorporate It:** I'll play it during my morning walk, syncing my steps to the beat for energy.
 - **Activity:** Spending time in nature at the local park, sitting under a tree.
 - **Why It Matters:** The fresh air and quiet help me feel grounded and connected to myself.

- **How I'll Incorporate It:** I'll visit the park for 15 minutes after work, bringing a journal to reflect.
- **Activity:** Cuddling with my cat, Muffin, on the couch.
 - **Why It Matters:** Muffin's purring soothes me and reminds me I'm not alone.
 - **How I'll Incorporate It:** I'll set aside 10 minutes each evening for cuddle time, free of distractions.
- **Activity:** Savoring a delicious treat, like dark chocolate and raspberries.
 - **Why It Matters:** The rich flavors bring me joy and a moment of indulgence I often deny myself.
 - **How I'll Incorporate It:** I'll treat myself to this once a week on Friday afternoons as a reward.

Tool: Use a joy-and-comfort tracker (e.g., spreadsheet or journal) to log these activities, noting when you do them, how they feel, and any adjustments needed. Set a goal to try at least one activity weekly, celebrating how it impacts your mood.

Write down your list of activities, including at least two specific details for each (e.g., sensory aspects, timing). Reflect on why these matter to you and how they can become part of your healing routine. Update this list as your preferences or circumstances change.

Section 2: Grounding When Overwhelmed

When memories, emotions, or triggers from abuse feel intense, grounding techniques can bring you back to the present moment, reducing anxiety and restoring calm. This section provides practical exercises to help you stay centered.

Grounding Techniques

Choose or combine these techniques to use when you feel overwhelmed. Practice them regularly to build confidence and effectiveness.

1. **5 Senses Exercise: Name 5 Things You See, 4 Things You Hear, 3 Things You Can Touch, 2 Things You Can Smell, and 1 Thing You Can Taste.**
 - **How to Use It:** Pause, focus on your surroundings, and list items for each sense. This distracts from intrusive thoughts and anchors you in the present.
 - **Example:**
 - **See:** The blue sky, a tree, my coffee mug, a bird flying, the green grass.
 - **Hear:** Birds chirping, wind rustling leaves, distant traffic, my breathing, a clock ticking.
 - **Touch:** The soft couch, my jeans, the cool mug handle, my hair, the smooth floor.
 - **Smell:** Fresh-cut grass, my coffee, lavender from a candle, rain in the air, nothing (clean air).
 - **Taste:** The bitterness of my coffee, nothing (if no taste is present, imagine a mint or gum).
 - **Tool:** Use a 5 Senses card or app (e.g., grounding apps like Calm) to guide you through this exercise. Practice daily or during calm moments to build the habit, then use it during triggers.

2. **Breathe Deep: Focus on 5 Slow, Deep Breaths, Inhaling Through the Nose and Exhaling Through the Mouth (Can Extend as You Get Comfortable).**
 - **How to Use It:** Sit or stand comfortably, close your eyes if safe, and take 5 slow breaths—inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4. Extend to 6-8 counts as you feel ready.
 - **Example:** “I was feeling panicked after a memory, so I sat on my couch, closed my eyes, and took 5 deep breaths, focusing on the air filling my lungs, which calmed me down.”
 - **Tool:** Use a breathing timer app (e.g., Insight Timer) or set a 1-minute alarm to practice daily. Pair with a soothing word (e.g., “peace”) to enhance focus.
3. **Safe, Calming Space: Visualize a Place Where You Feel Peaceful. Include as Many Sensory Details as Possible.**
 - **How to Use It:** Close your eyes (if safe), imagine a peaceful place (e.g., a beach, forest, childhood home), and describe its sights, sounds, smells, touches, and tastes. Stay in this visualization for 5-10 minutes.
 - **Example:** “I picture a quiet beach—soft sand under my feet, the sound of waves crashing, the salty sea air, the warmth of the sun, and the taste of a cool drink. It feels safe and calming.”
 - **Tool:** Use a guided imagery recording (e.g., on YouTube or Calm) or write a detailed description in your journal to revisit during overwhelm. Practice weekly to strengthen the visualization.

Tool: Create a grounding toolkit—include a 5 Senses list, breathing guide, and visualization script on a card or in an app. Carry it or keep it accessible (e.g., phone, wallet) for quick use. Practice each technique 2-3 times weekly in calm moments to prepare for triggers.

Write down one example of using each technique, noting how it felt and any adjustments needed. Set a goal to practice at least one technique daily, logging its impact on your anxiety or stress levels.

Section 3: Reminders of My Strength

Reconnecting with your inner strength and support system can rebuild confidence and resilience after abuse. This section helps you identify your qualities, supports, and safe places to draw on during recovery.

Qualities That Help You Through Hard Times

List 3-5 qualities you possess that have helped you navigate challenges, reinforcing your resilience and self-worth.

- **Prompt:** Write down 3-5 personal qualities, including why they matter and how they’ve supported you in the past.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Quality:** Resilience
 - **Why It Matters:** I’ve bounced back from tough times, like overcoming a difficult breakup, by staying determined.

- **Past Support:** After leaving an abusive job, I kept pushing forward, finding a new role that suited me.
- **Quality:**Kindness
 - **Why It Matters:** My empathy helps me connect with others and build supportive relationships, even when I'm struggling.
 - **Past Support:** I comforted a friend after their loss, which reminded me of my capacity to care, even in pain.
- **Quality:**Determination
 - **Why It Matters:** I don't give up easily, which has helped me seek therapy and stick with recovery.
 - **Past Support:** I persisted in attending support groups, even on hard days, which strengthened my healing.

Tool: Use an affirmations app (e.g., I Am) or journal to create daily reminders of these qualities, like, "I am resilient and strong." Repeat them each morning or during grounding exercises.

Write down your qualities, including at least one specific past example for each. Reflect on how recognizing these strengths can motivate you during recovery. Update this list as you discover new strengths.

Support System

List 3-5 people, hotlines, or online resources you can turn to for support, even just to listen. These should feel safe and accessible.

- **Prompt:**Write down your supports, including their names, roles, contact information (if applicable), and why they're helpful.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Support:**Maria Lopez (Friend)
 - **Role:** Listening and emotional support
 - **Contact:** 555-123-4567
 - **Why Helpful:** She's nonjudgmental and always there to listen when I'm struggling.
 - **Support:**National Domestic Violence Hotline
 - **Role:** Crisis support and safety planning
 - **Contact:** 1-800-799-7233, <https://www.thehotline.org/>
 - **Why Helpful:** Offers 24/7 confidential guidance for my safety and recovery.
 - **Support:**Online Forum (Reddit r/SurvivorsOfNarcissism)
 - **Role:** Peer support and advice
 - **Contact:** <https://www.reddit.com/r/SurvivorsOfNarcissism/>
 - **Why Helpful:** I can anonymously share experiences and feel less alone.

Tool: Use a support network tracker (e.g., spreadsheet or app like Circle of Friends) to log interactions, noting frequency and how they help. Set a goal to contact one support weekly.

Write down your support system, including at least one reason each is valuable. Reflect on how often you use these supports and whether you need to expand or adjust them.

Places of Safety

Identify 3-5 locations where you feel most at ease, offering a sense of calm and security during recovery.

- **Prompt:**List your safe places, including their locations, why they feel safe, and how you'll access them.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Place:**My Home (Living Room)
 - **Location:** 123 Safe Street, Anytown, CA
 - **Why Safe:** It's my private space with locks, and I feel calm surrounded by my books and plants.
 - **Access:** I'll ensure the door is locked and create a soothing corner with candles and music.
 - **Place:**Local Park (Oak Grove)
 - **Location:** 456 Peaceful Rd, Anytown, CA
 - **Why Safe:** The open space and nature help me feel grounded and free from stress.
 - **Access:** I'll visit for 15 minutes after work, bringing a journal for reflection.
 - **Place:**Maria's House
 - **Location:** 789 Comfort Lane, Anytown, CA
 - **Why Safe:** Maria offers a secure, nonjudgmental space, and she's a trusted friend.
 - **Access:** I'll call her (555-123-4567) discreetly if I need to visit.

Tool: Use a safe places map (e.g., Google Maps) to plot these locations, calculating travel time and ensuring discreet access. Keep a list or photo in your phone or journal for quick reference.

Write down your safe places, including at least one sensory detail for each (e.g., "The smell of grass in the park"). Reflect on how these places can support your healing and whether you need new options.

Section 4: Additional Ideas for Empowerment

These creative and practical strategies can enhance your recovery, offering additional ways to rebuild strength and self-worth.

Affirmations

Create 3-5 positive statements to repeat when you feel discouraged, reinforcing your worth and resilience.

- **Prompt:** Write down affirmations that resonate with you, including why they're meaningful and how you'll use them.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Affirmation:** "I am worthy of love and respect."
 - **Why Meaningful:** It counters the self-doubt from abuse, reminding me I deserve kindness.
 - **How I'll Use It:** I'll say it daily in the mirror or during grounding exercises.
 - **Affirmation:** "I am getting stronger every day."
 - **Why Meaningful:** It acknowledges my progress, even on hard days, boosting my motivation.
 - **How I'll Use It:** I'll write it on a sticky note by my bed and read it each morning.
 - **Affirmation:** "I trust my instincts to keep me safe."
 - **Why Meaningful:** It rebuilds confidence in my judgment, weakened by manipulation.
 - **How I'll Use It:** I'll repeat it during moments of fear or doubt, like before calling a support.

Tool: Use an affirmations app (e.g., I Am) or create affirmation cards to carry or post around your safe spaces. Practice saying them aloud 2-3 times daily, especially after grounding exercises.

Write down your affirmations, including at least one reason each feels meaningful. Reflect on how they can boost your confidence and when you'll use them.

Space for Doodles or Coloring

Engage in creative expression to soothe your mind and process emotions, offering a non-verbal outlet for healing.

- **Prompt:** Dedicate a page or section for doodles, sketches, or coloring. Include 2-3 ideas for designs or themes that feel calming or empowering.
 - **Examples:**
 - Draw a peaceful scene, like a beach or forest, with soft lines and colors (e.g., blues, greens).
 - Sketch a symbol of strength, like a tree with deep roots or a butterfly emerging, using bold or vibrant colors.
 - Color mandalas or patterns from a printable workbook (e.g., free downloads on Pinterest), focusing on repetitive motions for calm.
 - **Tool:** Use a doodle journal, coloring book, or app (e.g., Colorfy) for creative expression. Keep colored pencils, markers, or crayons in your safe space for easy access. Practice for 10-15 minutes daily or when feeling overwhelmed.

Write down your creative ideas, including any materials you'll need and when you'll start. Reflect on how this activity feels and how it supports your healing.

"Celebrate" Small Victories

Recognize and celebrate even tiny accomplishments to build momentum and self-esteem during recovery.

- **Prompt:** List 3-5 small victories you've achieved recently or plan to achieve, including why they matter and how you'll celebrate them.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Victory:** Getting out of bed and dressed on a hard day.
 - **Why It Matters:** It's a step toward reclaiming control and routine after feeling paralyzed by trauma.
 - **Celebration:** I'll treat myself to a cup of my favorite tea and listen to a song I love.
 - **Victory:** Reaching out to a friend via text to share a thought.
 - **Why It Matters:** It reconnects me with support, countering isolation from abuse.
 - **Celebration:** I'll take a short walk in my safe park to feel proud and grounded.
 - **Victory:** Completing one grounding exercise during a trigger.
 - **Why It Matters:** It builds my coping skills and reduces anxiety, showing progress in healing.
 - **Celebration:** I'll note it in my journal and reward myself with a small chocolate treat.

Tool: Use a victories journal or app (e.g., Habitica) to log achievements, noting dates, feelings, and celebrations. Set a goal to celebrate at least one victory weekly, reinforcing your progress.

Write down your small victories, including at least one celebration idea for each. Reflect on how recognizing these steps boosts your confidence and motivation. Update this list as you achieve new milestones.

Important Notes

- **You Don't Need to Do Everything Every Day:** Pick what feels helpful in the moment—progress, not perfection, is key. Healing is personal and nonlinear, so be patient with yourself.
- **Healing Isn't Linear:** Some days will be harder than others—acknowledge setbacks without judgment, and celebrate progress, no matter how small. Research shows trauma recovery often involves ups and downs, with forward movement over time.
- **Consider Professional Guidance:** If these steps feel overwhelming or you're struggling, seek a therapist specializing in trauma recovery for personalized support. They can help you process abuse, build coping skills, and navigate recovery safely.

Tool: Use a healing tracker (e.g., calendar or app) to log your activities, grounding techniques, and victories, noting how they impact your mood and strength. Review monthly to assess progress and adjust as needed.

Further Resources

- **National Hotlines:**

- U.S.: National Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-799-7233, <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- Canada: Canadian Women’s Foundation – 1-866-863-0511, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/services.html>
- **Local Support:** Contact your local domestic violence shelter or crisis center (e.g., ShelterSafe.ca for Canada) for region-specific help and trauma recovery programs.
- **Books:**
 - *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk – Insights on trauma recovery and self-empowerment.
 - *Women Who Run with the Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés – Stories and strategies for reclaiming strength after trauma.
- **Online:**
 - Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/>) – Find therapists near you specializing in trauma recovery.
 - Out of the Fog (<https://outofthefog.website/>) – Resources and support for healing from narcissistic abuse.
- **Apps:**
 - *Calm* – Guided meditations and grounding exercises for stress and trauma recovery.
 - *Headspace* – Mindfulness tools to build resilience and manage overwhelm.

Final Thoughts

Rebuilding strength after abuse is a journey of small, meaningful steps—and you’re already taking them by engaging with this worksheet. These actions—finding joy, grounding yourself, and celebrating your strength—empower you to heal, feel safer, and reclaim your identity. Be kind to yourself, seek support when needed, and trust in your resilience. Start today by trying one activity, grounding technique, or victory celebration—your path to self-empowerment begins here. If you feel unsafe, prioritize safety by reaching out to a hotline or professional—your well-being is the priority.