

THREE



Thinking Things Through

THINKING: to form or have in mind, to have as an opinion, to reflect on: ponder, to reason.

WE MUST DARE to think “unthinkable” thoughts. We must learn to explore all the options and possibilities that confront us in a complex and rapidly changing world. We must learn to welcome and not to fear the voices of dissent. We must dare to think about “unthinkable things” because when things become unthinkable, thinking stops and action becomes mindless.

—J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT, *The Arrogance of Power*

BREAK, BREAK, BREAK

On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

—TENNYSON, *The Beggar Maid*

MAKING SENSE OF YOUR POSTTRAUMA REACTIONS

In Chapter 1, we described the situations of Paul and Kirk who had similar serious car accidents. After Paul's accident, he felt afraid when driving, particularly when the conditions were similar to those in the accident—on the expressway, in the rain. But after several weeks, he no longer felt quite so afraid except occasionally when he saw someone else driving erratically. Kirk, on the other hand, felt emotionally paralyzed following his accident. He felt too unsafe even to get behind the wheel. Several weeks after the accident, he still felt afraid when not at home most of the time. He felt fear crossing the street and in a crowded store where someone could bump him.

Why is there such a difference between their reactions? It's because the accidents had different meanings for them. They reacted according to the lessons each drew from the accident—and they drew different lessons.

Your reactions to trauma—your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—are a result not only of the facts of the event, but also of what you think those facts mean. You can't change the facts, but the lesson you draw from them is probably not the only one possible. There is usually more than one meaning for any set of facts.

For Paul, the meaning of the accident applied only to driving, and primarily to driving in traffic. For Kirk, the accident meant he was always at risk, almost everywhere. Traumatic events do not occur in a vacuum. They occur within the context of a whole life, including current and past experiences. A bad past experience can make a recent, similar event more troubling, whether or not you are aware of the similarity. In addition, if you are under a lot of stress or do not have support from other people, you may be more likely to experience a difficult event as traumatic. If we spoke with Kirk more extensively about the accident and other difficult times in his life, we would be likely to hear about other times that he felt unsafe. These old experiences may have left him more vulnerable to feeling unsafe in this new situation.

Healing from trauma often involves gaining a new perspective that allows you to see the facts differently. This chapter explains how to do that. We start with a few basic distinctions that can usually be ignored in day-to-day life. Specifically, we look at how facts, reactions, and meanings are different but also connected. Later in this chapter, we will look at how trauma can disrupt the deeper beliefs you have about yourself, others, and the world and what you can do about that disruption.

Sorting Facts from Reactions

Kirk's reaction to his car accident was to feel afraid most of the time. This is a common reaction following trauma. Although such fear often goes away on its own, sometimes it doesn't. It didn't get better for Kirk. Part of the reason was that he didn't fully understand the relationship between the *facts* of a situation and his *reactions*. Kirk thought that feeling fear meant that he must be in danger. It is true that fear is an important signal that we might be unsafe. We need to pay attention when we feel fear. However, fear often signals only a possibility of danger that must then be checked out. It is possible to feel fear and be quite safe, or to have no fear but actually be in great danger. Thinking you are unsafe, whether or not you actually are, generally stirs feelings of fear. Feeling fear can call up more thoughts of being unsafe. Thoughts and feelings can build on each other, escalating. Fear can be so compelling that it seems a fact about the present; but thoughts and feelings are not facts. They are reactions and they often have to do with something that reminds you of the past or that you are imagining about the future. Often, we react to reminders of the past without even realizing it. Kirk was walking down the street on his way to work one day when he suddenly felt overwhelmed with fear. It was all he could do to get to the building where he worked, where he felt safe. It initially seemed that the fear came out of nowhere but there had been triggers. First, there had been a siren in the distance that he hadn't consciously noticed but that had put him a little on edge. Then nearby a car accelerated fast after a red light, tires squealing. There had been squealing tires just before Kirk's accident. He reacted to the sound now with intense fear; the danger felt real and immediate. But how unsafe was he, in fact? He thinks he knows because his reactions are so intense. But he hasn't thought about how accurate his reactions are in the present situation.

Thoughts and feelings give you important information about how to act and take care of yourself. It is especially important to pay attention to feelings of fear. However, it is also important to ask yourself if fear is warning of present danger, or if it is based on a reminder of the past or a worry about the future.

Sorting Facts from Meanings

Knowing all the facts in a situation helps us know how best to respond. Unfortunately, we often don't know all the facts. What was that noise in the kitchen? It's a fact that there was a noise, but what does it mean? Was it the cat getting into trouble? Or has someone broken into the house? It's hard to know how to react until we know what the sound means. Facts do not always carry obvious meanings. Even when we know the basic facts of a situation, and agree on them, we may not all agree on what they mean. This is because facts can often mean more than one thing.

Is a bottle of water half full or half empty? The amount of water, eight ounces, is a physical fact that can be measured. This fact is independent of who we are, what we think or feel. But that same fact can mean different things to different people or even to the same person in different situations. If you are thirsty and believe there is nothing to drink, you can be delighted to find that there is still some water left in the bottle. If you believe there is a full bottle to share with friends, you will be disappointed to find it only half full. The meaning that the water bottle has for you depends on the whole situation. This includes what you bring to that situation, what you expect, what has happened to you in the past, and what you believe those past experiences have meant to you. Meanings are not the same as facts. There is no right or wrong meaning to the water bottle. There is not necessarily one best meaning. It is possible to have many different meanings that all fit the same facts.

Kirk believed the meaning of his car accident was "I'm not safe anymore." He knew he couldn't undo the fact of the accident and he thought meanings operated in the same way. They don't. Meanings are the way we interpret facts. It is very possible, and even probable, that an event can be interpreted in two or more ways and both can fit the facts.

Let's look at another example.

✂ Cindy and Jack were working in the same high-rise office building in New York City near the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. They heard the impact of the planes, saw the flames, smoke, and bodies falling. They feared for their lives when the towers collapsed. The tragedy left them both shaken, but in different ways. Cindy's life had revolved around an ambitious career but after 9/11 her career didn't seem to matter as much anymore. She didn't see how she could ever feel safe working in a skyscraper again. She felt frightened and lost. Jack had been a generally laid-back, even-tempered guy. He reacted to 9/11 with shock, fear, and then anger. He felt personally attacked, with a strong urge to fight back. His anger fueled a need

to find out how the attack had happened and do whatever he could to make sure it didn't happen again. He felt focused, driven with a new mission in life.

Cindy and Jack had very different reactions to the same event because it meant different things to them. However, both were shaken because their *experiences contradicted their core beliefs* that they were safe and in control of their lives.

MAKING SENSE OF BELIEFS

Beliefs are meanings about ourselves, other people, and the world that we have come to rely on very deeply. We develop these deep beliefs from what has happened to us, from watching what happens around us, and from what we've been told to believe. Children often believe what they are told: "Strangers are dangerous," "Listen to and respect grown-ups," "Don't burden people with your problems," "You're bad." If you witness violence in your home growing up, you may believe that caring people hurt each other or that you never leave a relationship no matter how damaging it might be. On the other hand, your past experiences may have led you to believe that you are safe, that you are in control of what happens to you, that others are trustworthy, or that no matter what happens, things will work out all right in the end.

Once we've formed our core beliefs, we usually stop thinking much about them. They become a natural part of who we are and how we function. We tend to act on them automatically, as reflex. Cindy didn't realize she believed, "I'm safe; I'm in control of my life," until the trauma shocked her into considering that these deep beliefs might be wrong.

Beliefs can and do change. Most of the time they change gradually as the weight of our experience shapes what we believe. The process is similar to the way a river gradually shifts its course as the surrounding terrain erodes. This process of belief change is called *accommodation*. With trauma, however, basic beliefs can change quickly and dramatically, the way an earthquake can suddenly shift the course of a river. A trauma may cause a belief to intensify, become absolute, reverse itself, or collapse altogether.

On 9/11 Cindy's beliefs about being safe and in control flipped 180 degrees. She suddenly felt completely unsafe and unable to control events. She believed this as completely as she once believed the opposite. Were her new beliefs any more true and accurate than the old ones? Actually, no; both her old and new beliefs have an absolute, all-or-nothing quality to them. This quality can cause problems.

The Trouble with All-or-Nothing Thinking

Survivors of trauma, like Cindy, often think in all-or-nothing terms. Overwhelmed with powerful feelings, they tend to feel completely safe or completely in dan-

ger, completely in control or completely out of control. When trauma shatters a basic belief it can seem best to believe the extreme opposite. It may feel most self-protective to not expect anything positive from yourself or others. If you thought you were safe and suddenly found yourself in a life-threatening situation, it may seem much safer always to assume high risk than to assume safety. You may then feel better prepared to protect or defend yourself.

⌘ *When Angie married, she had never before felt so cared for. She trusted her husband completely. It was a little over a year into their marriage when he first hit her. He was extremely remorseful, promising it would never happen again. Several months later, another violent incident occurred and more followed. Angie couldn't believe the change in this man she had so loved and trusted. She had no way to make sense of his violent behavior except to think that, apparently, you could never really know or trust anybody. She began to view everyone with suspicion and distrust.*

Angie was able to leave the abusive marriage but the lesson she drew was that it's best to distrust everyone unless they prove themselves totally trustworthy. It was a way of staying safe and protecting herself. The stakes were high—as they usually are with trauma—and she felt totally unsafe trusting even a little bit. However, trusting is a basic human need and not being able to trust anyone at all causes its own pain and problems. Does Angie really have to choose between the two basic needs of safety and trust? It may initially seem that way, but it's possible to choose both.

Angie is assuming that it is possible to be completely safe if she gives up trusting others—but this is not true. This is an imperfect and flawed world; there is no way to guarantee absolute or perfect safety for anybody, regardless of what they give up. However, we are not saying that Angie can never be safe. Safety is not absolute, but neither is danger. There are many ways to be safe, and many degrees of safety and risk. The same is true of trust.

Angie doesn't have to choose between trust and safety if she can begin to think about the wide range of real possibilities between all and nothing. Trust can mean many different things and have many different degrees. After Angie thought about it, she found she could expand from two categories of trustworthiness (all and nothing) to five.

1	2	3	4	5
Distrust completely	Trust for low-risk requests	Trust with medium-risk requests	Trust quite a lot	Trust completely

In Angie's day-to-day life this translated as follows:

1. *Distrust completely.* Avoid this person whenever possible, have minimal contact.
2. *Trust for low-risk requests.* May ask to borrow milk or a flashlight from this person when needed.
3. *Trust with medium-risk requests.* May call this person for support after a bad day.
4. *Trusts quite a lot.* May ask this person to babysit daughter when I have a doctor's appointment.
5. *Trust completely.* Can call to talk to this person when feeling very upset about something.

These five (or potentially more) degrees of trust offer Angie many more options. If she had to consider everyone either totally trustworthy or totally untrustworthy, she would end up with much less support and far fewer choices in her life.

How Do You Think about Things?

Has your traumatic experience changed the way you think about some things? In which situations have you noticed this?

Are there situations in which you tend to use all-or-nothing thinking?

If so, how does this type of thinking protect you?

How does this type of thinking limit you?

What feelings, thoughts, or situations would be different if you had more than just two options?

As you continue through this workbook, try to remember that most things in life are not all or nothing, black or white. Real life not only has many shades of gray but also many other colors. Remember that every time you expand your thinking to consider a fuller range of possibilities, you also will have more options in how you live your life.

Accommodation: Understanding How Beliefs Change

As we have just discussed, a single traumatic experience can suddenly change a core belief. Most of the time, beliefs change more slowly and gradually through the process called accommodation. When something happens, we automatically check the experience against our existing sense of ourselves, others, and the world. If the facts don't fit our beliefs enough of the time, those beliefs will gradually change to fit the facts. Our beliefs *accommodate* to our experiences. The process is so automatic we usually aren't aware we are doing it.

Suppose you believe no one enjoys being with you. You would then not expect to be invited to join a group on a ski trip. But what if you were? What would you do with this new information? It does not fit your belief that people don't like you. At first, your belief would probably remain strong because you could interpret the new facts to fit your belief. You might tell yourself that you were only invited because they needed an extra person to help fill up the condo they were renting. Or they feel sorry for you because no one else is likely to invite you anywhere. In other words, the invitation doesn't mean they like you. But if you accept the invitation and then keep getting more invitations from these people, your belief that they dislike you might begin to change bit by bit. The belief would begin to *accommodate* the new facts. First, you might allow yourself to believe that perhaps one person enjoys your company, but that doesn't mean the others necessarily do. Over time, you might come to see that the belief that nobody likes you was based on outdated or incorrect information. Your new belief might be that you are likable and some people do enjoy your company.

In order for the accommodation process to take place, there are two basic requirements:

1. You need to repeatedly come into contact with facts that do not fit the belief.
2. You need to pay attention to those facts while keeping an open mind.

These may sound like the same step, but they are different. Beliefs are based on real past experiences. Changes in beliefs come out of real experiences too. If you are assaulted or in a car accident, this is real-world evidence that contradicts the belief that you are *always* safe. It's evidence you can't ignore. Your belief may change to "I am *never* safe outside my house." If you then never actually go outside your house, you will never come into contact with evidence that the belief could be wrong.

Even if a belief is inaccurate, it won't change until you have enough real evidence that it's inaccurate.

Coming into contact with contrary facts isn't always enough for a belief to change. That's because we ignore many of our day-to-day experiences. This is where the second requirement comes in: You must keep an open mind and pay attention to the facts. If you don't have an open mind, you will find it difficult to even notice evidence against a belief when you see it. It is easy to automatically dismiss, ignore, or explain away contradictory evidence. This is natural, but not necessarily in your best interest. While it is wise not to make big changes on the basis of a single experience, explaining away multiple "exceptions" can happen so fast you may not notice it has happened.

Kirk's car accident made him believe he was not at all safe outside his house. Yet he did come and go safely—even on the day he became so frightened. He saw each time as a single exception that did not count. He didn't notice that over time, evidence was building that he was actually safer than he felt. If he could pay more attention to the evidence over time, his beliefs about safety would have a chance to gradually accommodate to his present-day life; he'd then feel more comfortable and less afraid. He can speed the process if he knows how to keep an open mind and what to pay attention to.

If you have trouble staying present, aware, and open-minded in some situations, mindfulness exercises, as mentioned in Chapter 2, can help you. You might notice that, coincidentally, the second requirement for accommodation (paying attention with an open mind) is very much like Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness (see Chapter 2): "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally." Meditation is not the only way to be mindful. Any activity can be done mindfully and you don't need to call it mindfulness to do it.

Trauma and the Five Basic Needs

Trauma throws you for a loop because it changes your core beliefs about one or more of five basic human needs: safety, trust, control, self-esteem, and intimacy. We need enough of these things for ourselves and for those close to us. When we don't get enough of what we need, we can begin to experience distress.

Box 3.1 offers basic descriptions of what we mean by each of these needs. As we will see in Chapters 4 through 8, these are not the only meanings. Each need can mean something different for different people. A key part of this workbook is to help you discover what these needs mean to you.

If you are experiencing troubling posttrauma reactions, it can probably be traced to a change in your thinking about one or more of these five needs. You may no longer feel safe or able to trust. You may feel out of control, worthless, or alone. You may have any or all of these reactions. If you do, your trauma experience has probably disrupted your beliefs about that need. What did that need mean to you before the trauma? How has it changed since the trauma? (If you were very young

BOX 3.1. Five Basic Needs Often Disrupted by Trauma

Safety for yourself:	The need to feel that you are reasonably protected from harm inflicted by yourself, by others, or by the environment
Safety for others:	The need to feel that people you value are reasonably protected from harm inflicted by yourself, others, or the environment
Trust in yourself:	The need to rely on your own judgment
Trust in others:	The need to rely on others
Control of yourself:	The need to feel in charge of your own actions
Control with others:	The need to have some influence or impact on others
Esteem for yourself:	The need to value what you feel, think, and believe
Esteem for others:	The need to value others
Intimacy with yourself:	The need to know and accept your own feelings and thoughts
Intimacy with others:	The need to be known and accepted by others

Adapted from L. A. Pearlman and K. W. Saakvitne, *Trauma and the Therapist: Countertransference and Widespread Traumatization in Psychotherapy with Incest Survivors*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1995, p. 62; and J. L. McCann and L. A. Pearlman, *Psychological Trauma and the Adult Survivor*. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1984, p. 23.

when the trauma occurred, you may not remember how things were before.) What lessons did you draw from the trauma about that need? Are those lessons accurate? Are there other possible meanings to events in your current life? Perhaps you do not need to feel hopeless about regaining a sense of safety, trust, or intimacy.

Why Identify Your Basic Beliefs?

Your beliefs influence how you interpret events and interactions with other people. For example, suppose you arranged to meet a friend and she still has not arrived 20 minutes after the meeting time. If you believe “I’m not important,” then you are likely to think, “She doesn’t value me,” “She must not really want to see me,” and so on. You will probably then feel shame, sadness, self-loathing, or anger at the friend. You might storm away feeling hurt before she arrives because you believe her lateness means you are not important to her. All your negative beliefs about yourself and others will seem to be proven—but they aren’t. You are actually jumping to a conclusion about the situation on the basis of insufficient evidence.

Let’s take the same situation and filter it through a different belief—that “I’m

important.” In this case, you might think that your friend has difficulty managing her time, or that something unexpected came up, or that she was caught in traffic. If you believe the friend values you, you would be more likely to wait and listen to her reasons for being late. If she doesn’t arrive, you might be disappointed, even annoyed, but you’d get in touch soon to make sure she was all right and find out what happened. This, in turn, would certainly influence whether the incident was a blip in the relationship or a major turning point.

When you learn to identify your beliefs, you come to know yourself, know who you are, and where you really stand. After trauma you may not know who you are anymore. Discovering what you now believe, after trauma, is a way to ground yourself again. It shows you choices you cannot see now but that are, in fact, there. As we will see in Chapter 6, knowing yourself in this way is a foundation for personal power. Coming to knowing yourself is not an easy task for anyone. It is especially difficult if you are afraid of what you might find out. This is why discovering your beliefs should be done slowly, carefully, and at your own pace. It should be done with a strong safety net of self-care activities and a strong sense of compassion toward yourself. The first step in coming to both know and care for yourself is to respect your fears and other feelings. Don’t ignore or judge them; listen to them. The rest of this workbook is designed to help you trace your trauma reactions to changed beliefs about your basic needs.

TRACKING REACTIONS TO THEIR SOURCE IN CHANGED BELIEFS

Most of us take our basic beliefs about trust, safety, control, self-esteem, and intimacy for granted, but traumatic events have a way of leading us to question such basic assumptions about the world. This is a key part of what makes trauma so uncomfortable. It can feel terribly disorienting and confusing.

⌘ *Bruce was at the stadium when an earthquake struck. Thoughts flashed through his mind: Am I going to die? Will anyone be able to find me if the building collapses? Will I be able to escape if I get hurt? Although he had never worried much about these things before, he became preoccupied with them after the earthquake. He frequently had random thoughts about being injured in a variety of situations. He was often afraid. Only now did he realize that he had taken his safety for granted. He had believed he could control his safety but now he felt totally out of control. He felt as though safety itself was lost to him and he was now in great danger. Then he realized he must have been in danger all along, but only after the earthquake did it really sink in. His earlier sense of safety must have been an illusion; now that illusion was destroyed.*

Bruce isn’t crazy to feel he has lost something. He has. He has lost his *belief* that he is safe. Has his *actual* level of safety changed after the earthquake? Prob-

ably not. He lives in an earthquake-prone area. There was risk before, and the risk will continue. What has changed is that he can no longer ignore the risk as he did before. Now that he realizes the risk, he believes he cannot be safe at all. He makes this connection automatically and isn't even aware of it. If he begins to pay attention to what he's feeling and thinking, he can become aware that he believes "If there is risk, I cannot be safe." If safety can *only* mean zero risk, then his fear makes more sense. It is very uncomfortable to live in fear. Is it possible to be safe in spite of some risk and if so, what does that mean?

Risk is real. The need for safety is real. But neither is total. Neither is absolute. If Bruce keeps an open mind, he can begin to find out what it means to him to be "safe enough." He can do this by paying attention to all of the evidence, continuing to ask questions, and finding safe ways to test current beliefs and possible alternatives. He may find that he cannot feel safe unless he moves to a place that doesn't have earthquakes. However, this doesn't have to be the case. Many people feel they can be safe enough to have a full life despite being at some degree of risk.

How to Identify Your Basic Beliefs and Evaluate Them

When a traumatic event disrupts a basic belief, we notice it first in our thoughts, feelings, and actions. By observing those changed reactions, we can begin to discover the belief underneath that doesn't fit anymore. The process of identifying and evaluating your basic beliefs has four steps:

- ◆ Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings in reaction to a situation
- ◆ Pay attention to the facts of the situation
- ◆ Identify the belief through which you interpret the facts
- ◆ Evaluate the pros and cons of the particular belief

In this workbook, we ask you to focus on recent situations that have presented problems for you. When you can sort out your reactions from the facts of the situation, the belief through which you see the situation becomes more visible. When it becomes visible, you can begin to evaluate its accuracy and usefulness. The process starts with paying attention to what you feel and think.

Pay Attention to Thoughts and Feelings

Paying attention to what you are feeling and thinking is the easiest way to identify a belief shaken by trauma. A shaken belief will lead to changes in your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Suppose you experience a rush of thoughts such as "I better not answer my phone," "I can't imagine leaving my apartment," "That person behind me in line yesterday made me nervous when he talked to me." If you think these things, you are likely to feel anxious, fearful, or panicky. It might help you to stop and notice clearly that "I'm feeling very scared" or "I've been afraid a lot

lately." What does it mean that you've been afraid a lot lately? You may conclude, "I am not safe." This conclusion may *feel* like fact but it is an interpretation of one or more situations that may or may not be accurate. What do you know for sure and what are you assuming about it? That is why it is useful to identify the actual facts of the situation.

Pay Attention to the Facts

Facts include things that are seen, heard, said, or done; they are observable. Facts do not include your or another person's meanings, motivations, or intentions. Stay alert to the evidence. What are the facts? Can you separate the facts from what you think they mean?

Identify the Belief through Which You Interpret the Facts

Can you see the difference between the facts of a situation and what you think it means? If so, you should be able to identify a belief that leads you to interpret the facts in a particular way. Beliefs are often so automatic that we do not take time to notice what they are. You can become aware of your beliefs, evaluate their accuracy, and examine their effects on your life. Understanding your beliefs and bringing them into awareness can be especially helpful for people who have experienced trauma.

Evaluate How the Belief Helps and Hinders You

Most beliefs have both advantages and disadvantages. If you believe you are safe only inside your house, you will mostly stay inside your house. That probably *will* be safer than driving. But how much safer, and at what cost? If you stay in your house, it may be harder to get other essential needs met, such as for intimacy and support. You may become depressed if you never go out. Do you feel you must give up one need in order to get another? If your beliefs have more advantages than disadvantages, that's good; but if they tend to hinder rather than help you, there are almost certainly other, better choices if only you can learn to see them.

If your beliefs hinder more than help you, we want you to entertain the possibility that other meanings might fit the facts. We ask you to try this in spite of how strongly you may hold your belief. Can you imagine doing this even if only as a mental exercise? Being able to imagine the possibility (not probability) of something different is what we mean by keeping an open mind. After trauma, it can be very easy to misread or misinterpret events in your current life. It can be easy to miss seeing all the facts, especially those that don't quite fit the belief.

When there are two interpretations that fit the facts equally well, you can choose the one that has the most advantages for you. You cannot always choose to

change the facts of your life, but you do have some choice when it comes to how to interpret those facts. Each of the next five chapters asks you to evaluate your beliefs in this way and to consider what choices you might really have.

Pinpointing Problem Areas to Think Through Further

As you identify your key beliefs in each of the five need areas, you may find that many of your beliefs make good sense to you, match the evidence well, and have more advantages than disadvantages. This is good. You probably do not need to think more about these beliefs at this time in your life. Other beliefs, however, may not be working well for you. In each chapter, we will ask you to take stock and consider where you are in your work and how ready you are to continue. You may or may not feel ready to continue the process at that point. You should feel free to set this book aside while you take time for self-care and other aspects of your life.

A Note of Caution

Testing beliefs can be enormously useful and liberating; it can also feel emotionally risky. Challenging old patterns of thinking can strip away some of what you've done to feel protected in your posttrauma world. If any belief is particularly frightening, you may not be ready to think it through. You probably need further practice with self-care or self-comforting, or to find additional support. If you still want to move ahead, don't try it alone. Find a qualified therapist with training in trauma to help guide you and keep you safe.

THINKING THROUGH A BELIEF

If and when you are ready to continue, we will ask you to think through a troublesome belief. We will ask you again to consider your thoughts and feelings and the evidence. Then we will ask you to take two further steps: (1) imagine possible alternative beliefs (or meanings) for the same set of facts and (2) plan how you can most safely collect evidence to check the accuracy of old and alternative beliefs.

The exercise "Steps for Thinking Through a Belief" in the chapters that follow is designed to help you do this. Start by writing down a belief you suspect might be troublesome. What situations come to mind in connection with that belief? Pick one of those situations, then think through that situation and the belief using the following steps:

- ◆ Sort out the facts of what happened.
- ◆ Sort out the meaning the facts have for you.

- ◆ Identity the underlying belief.
- ◆ Evaluate the pros and cons of the belief.
- ◆ Imagine alternative meanings for the same facts.
- ◆ Evaluate the pros and cons of the alternative meanings.
- ◆ Consider how to check the accuracy of the belief.
- ◆ Put the process in perspective.

Sheila knew what it was like to be kept waiting by a friend. This had happened to her. By paying attention to her reactions in the situation, and asking what they meant, she had identified the belief that "I am not a worthwhile person." She decided to think this belief through more carefully. Box 3.2 shows how Sheila filled out "Steps for Thinking Through a Belief."

When Sheila had completed the exercise, she had a small piece of doubt about how she was seeing the situation. She was able to imagine alternative reasons for what happened. The more she thought about them, the more of a possibility they seemed. Maybe she was being unfair by jumping to conclusions. Soon after that, Sheila's friend called, apologized profusely, and explained that she'd forgotten her cell phone and then had car trouble out on the highway. She was hoping they could reschedule, as she was so looking forward to seeing Sheila.

This one episode will not magically change Sheila's belief about herself. Beliefs change through repeated contact with new experiences. The exercise did, however, help her pay more attention when similar situations came up. Because she was paying better attention over time, the evidence started to accumulate. The accumulated weight of evidence eventually began to change Sheila's beliefs about herself, and how other people felt about her.

COLLECTING AND WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE ON WHAT YOU BELIEVE

As we explained earlier, there are two requirements for the accommodation process: You need to come into contact with facts that do not fit your belief and you need to pay attention to that evidence while keeping an open mind. When these two requirements are met, the accommodation process can happen on its own as it did for Sheila. However, it won't happen if one or both of the requirements are missing. It may feel much too risky to be in situations that could test your belief. Plus strong emotions like fear can prevent you from paying attention to contradictory evidence even when it's there. These are important concerns. Your safety comes first. *You should not try to collect evidence on a belief unless you feel you can do it safely enough.* This is why you need to *think ahead* and *plan* carefully before taking any action. The following are our planning suggestions for collecting evidence on a belief.

BOX 3.2. Steps for Thinking Through a Belief: How Sheila Completed the Exercise

Sort Out the Facts of What Happened

Think of a particular situation or encounter that bothered you. Describe the “facts.”

What happened?

I had made arrangements to meet a friend for lunch. I got there on time but 20 minutes later, she still hadn't shown up or called.

Sort Out the Meaning the Facts Have for You

How did you interpret this situation? What did it mean to you? If you have trouble, think about your reactions first and ask why you reacted that way to those facts.

My friend does not care about me. She doesn't even care enough to call and let me know what's going on.

Identify the Underlying Belief

What lessons did you draw about yourself? About other people?

I'm not valued by other people. I'm not important. I'm not worth caring about. People take me for granted. Other people don't value me.

When did you start believing this about yourself? Was this incident the first time? If not, when and how do you remember first learning this?

It reminds me of when I was growing up; my mother always told me that I was no good, and that she didn't want me. She never seemed to cherish me or even enjoy being with me. She often left me alone while she went out with friends, even when I was really young.

Evaluate the Pros and Cons of the Belief

How does believing this make you feel about yourself? What does it make you think about yourself?

I feel sad and worthless. I have really low self-esteem in these kinds of situations. It feels like an awfully big reaction given the current situation, but I really feel unlovable, like “Who am I to expect anyone to ever really be there for me or care?” It makes me think I can't count on anyone.

How does believing this protect or help you?

I don't expect much from other people; as long as I don't hope, I protect myself from disappointment. But it honestly doesn't work very well. I tell myself, “See? I knew it.” But inside, I still feel hurt and disappointed.

(cont.)

BOX 3.2 (cont.)

How does this assumption hold you back or get in your way?

I don't let myself get close to people; I'm so afraid that if someone gets to know me, they'll see the "real" me, and then know how unlovable I really am.

Imagine Alternative Meanings for the Same Facts

Look back at your description of what happened. Are there other ways to interpret what happened? What else could the situation mean? Is there an alternative meaning that would fit the facts of what happened? If so, what is it?

My friend was late. I guess there are a number of reasons that could happen. Sometimes when I'm late, it's because I've lost track of time or misjudged how long it would take me to get somewhere. Sometimes something comes up at the last minute that I have to take care of before leaving. Occasionally I forget about an appointment and I feel horrible when I put someone out because of my lack of organization.

Evaluate the Pros and Cons of the Alternative Meaning

What positive feelings do you have when you think about this alternative meaning?

It would feel so much better to think that maybe it's not because of me that she's late. It would make me feel better about my friend and a whole lot better about myself. It might help me believe that my friends don't see me the same way my mother saw me.

What negative feelings do you have when you think about this alternative meaning?

I'm foolish to get my hopes up. It leaves me feeling vulnerable and afraid of getting hurt again. I feel a little bit stronger when I have my emotional armor on.

Consider How to Check the Accuracy of These Beliefs

How could you test whether or not your belief is true?

I could ask my friend why she was late. I could even let her know that it's hard for me when she's late because it makes me begin to wonder if she reconsidered wanting to have lunch with me. Her response could give me a lot of useful information. I could also try to remember experiences with other friends and how much I've felt cared for or valued in other situations. I would also think about times I have felt that someone didn't care about me.

When you consider testing the accuracy of the belief, what are your fears? What is the worst that can happen?

If I questioned my friend, she could confirm my worst fears. I think that would devastate me. I'd feel like crawling into a hole and never coming out. I don't think I would

hurt someone else. At worst, I might say things to her to make her feel guilty, like "How could you do this to me? You acted like my friend and then hurt me." If I considered my other friendships, the worst thing that could happen would be that I would face evidence that I really am all alone in the world and no one cares about me. That would leave me feeling terrified and very lonely.

What good things might happen if you test the truth of what you believe?

If I learn that others see me completely differently from how I fear they do, this would help me feel better about myself and be more trusting of my friends. I imagine it would feel wonderful to be freer, more honest, and less fearful in my close relationships.

Put the Process in Perspective

Will testing the belief matter 10 years from now? Would it help or hinder you for the future?

If I took the risk to speak with my friend and the whole thing blew up in my face, I'd probably feel ashamed and exposed whenever I thought about it for a very, very long time. I may also use it as evidence against myself for a long time to come. But in 10 years? It probably wouldn't matter. And I may or may not even remember the whole incident, especially if it had a bad outcome. If there were a good outcome, it could certainly have an impact in 10 years. Working on this issue could affect the direction of my relationships with others and myself from now on.

Adapted with permission from the work of Catherine Fine, MD.

Brainstorm Ideas for Collecting Evidence

Brainstorming ideas is one approach for thinking up ways to collect evidence. Consider the task and then write down anything you think of, even if it seems unlikely, impractical, or silly. You may think that the only ways to collect evidence about a belief are high risk. This is usually not true. The high-risk ideas are often the ones you think of first; write them down to clear the way for other ideas. We do not want you to take any high risks. We want you to think up low-risk, manageable ideas.

Rank Ideas by Lowest Risk First

When you have written down a number of possible ways to collect evidence for the accuracy of a belief, the next step is to rank your ideas according to risk. The lowest-risk idea goes first, followed by the next-lowest-risk idea. Once you have a list that contains ideas that feel safe enough, you can consider carrying them out to collect evidence. Always start with the lowest-risk method first. For example, the simple act of paying attention to yourself and others is a very low-risk way to begin

collecting evidence on the accuracy of a belief. Other ways build on paying attention to what is already happening around you.

- ◆ Observe events and how people are acting.
- ◆ Watch other people's reactions to the event or action.
- ◆ Notice when you yourself are already carrying out actions that produce evidence about your belief.
- ◆ Ask friends questions about their reactions.
- ◆ When it feels safe enough, take a small action with a safe friend and see how the friend reacts to you.

Let's take a look at how Carol planned to collect evidence on a problem belief and what happened when she started to carry out her plan.

⌘ *Carol's parents were extremely controlling and cruel. While she was growing up, they never listened to her feelings or opinions and always put her down. When she was upset or cried, she was severely punished or sent to her room for hours at a time. She learned to conceal her feelings and act as if nothing bothered her.*

Carol believed that if she expressed her true feelings, she would be humiliated, abused, or abandoned. She saw the belief as true or false and she already had proof from her past that it could be true. What she hadn't considered was that the belief was not *always* true. If it was sometimes false, then it might make sense to learn as much as she could about when and under what conditions it might be false. Carol wrote down her existing belief:

"I will be humiliated if I express my feelings to others."

Then she thought of a possible alternative belief. She didn't actually believe this alternative but was willing to keep an open mind about it. It was:

"It is safe to express my feelings to some people and in some situations."

The next task was to make a list of ways she could gather evidence for or against both beliefs. It was a challenge to come up with first steps that would have a small enough risk to feel manageable. It helped her to know she could start by simply paying closer attention to the evidence that already existed around her. No one else had to be involved or even know what she was doing. As long as she was just on the sidelines, there seemed no real risk of humiliation or judgment coming directly at her. But what kinds of evidence could she notice? She came up with four different things to simply observe. She listed first the one that seemed easiest and made her feel least anxious. Then she listed the others in an order of increas-

ing anxiety. She was also able to think of a few small steps beyond those. When finished, her list of ways to test her belief went from least feared to most feared as follows:

LEAST FEARED

Notice how other people express feelings.

Notice how people respond when someone expresses feelings.

Notice what feelings I already sometimes express ("I hate it when it rains all weekend").

Notice how people already respond to me when I express a feeling.

Try to express some small degrees of feeling and notice the response; for example, I could try this out with a coworker, a neighbor, or a store clerk.

Ask a trusted friend how she feels when I express a feeling.

Try to express a slightly stronger feeling with my closest friend or in another situation where it feels safe to do so, to see what response I get.

Ask someone with whom I feel safe how he or she feels when I express stronger feelings.

MOST FEARED

Carry Out Lowest-Risk Ways to Collect Evidence

Carol's first four tasks involved paying attention to what was already happening around her. For this to work, she had to be as objective as possible. This meant being able to sort out what she observed (the facts) from what she might think, feel, or believe about what she saw. The evidence would either support or not support her belief that expressing her feelings would result in being judged or humiliated.

The first task on Carol's list seemed like it might be too easy to be of any help, so she was surprised to learn some things from doing it. She was usually so worried about expressing her own feelings that she didn't think much about what other people did. When was someone expressing a feeling, anyway? When weren't they? She began to notice how often people expressed feelings and that there were so many different ways they did it.

It was a little harder to pay attention to how people responded when someone expressed a feeling. It took a while before Carol realized she was ignoring much of what she saw. When people reacted calmly, thoughtfully, or downright positively to another's feelings, this behavior sometimes didn't register with her at all; at other times, she assumed people were *pretending* to react positively but were harshly judging privately. In other words, she found herself discounting what she had seen and

heard. This is exactly what she was trying *not* to do and yet she still did it. She had not realized this would be difficult.

As Carol worked at each step, she began to notice something interesting. Each time she started doing a new, slightly riskier test, she felt some anxiety. But as she kept doing that test, and really paying attention to the evidence, she became less anxious about it. When she made her list, she thought her third, fourth, and especially fifth test were fairly frightening. But by the time she felt comfortable with doing the first two tests, the next ones were less difficult to imagine doing, and certainly less scary than they had looked initially. This was true even though she noticed that some people got upset when others expressed emotion—just as she had feared. However, as she kept paying attention, she also saw that not everybody reacted this way; even when they did, they would usually get over it and it didn't seem to damage the relationships.

Weigh the Evidence on What You Believe

As you collect evidence for and against a belief, it is helpful to keep a record of what you notice and learn. In the chapters that follow, we provide an exercise to help you do this for individual situations. Here is how Carol completed the exercise for “Weighing the Evidence.”

A. List a situation in which you noticed a belief you want to think through more thoroughly. Last weekend I was planning to see a movie with a group of friends. Even though they asked what I wanted to see, my suggestions didn't get considered. Everyone decided they wanted to see something else. I felt like nothing I say or feel makes a difference.

What Evidence (Facts) Supports This Belief as Accurate?

1. My friends didn't seem to listen to my suggestion.
2. No one seemed to notice or care when I felt disappointed with the final decision.

What Evidence (Facts) Supports This Belief as Not Accurate?

1. My friends did ask me what I wanted to see. Maybe they were interested in my opinion but didn't hear my suggestion in the midst of everyone else making their suggestions.
2. When I think about other times I go out with friends, it seems that they do care about what I want to do or how I feel about things. When I look back, it seems that my voice is often lost when I'm with a group of people. Maybe it's because I'm more soft-spoken than others, so people hear me better when there's only two or three of us.

After thinking through evidence about a belief, you may find yourself more open to alternative interpretations. The exercise ended by asking Carol to rate how sure she was that her old belief was accurate. She still felt it was accurate, although a little doubt had crept in. She marked the belief on the scale (see below) as being 75% accurate. As you'll see in the chapters that follow, there is a second scale to use at a later date. This will help you to check on future changes in your beliefs in light of new evidence.

Date: _____



Troubleshooting When Beliefs Are Particularly Hard to Change

✂ At 17, Linda was raped by someone she had just met. It was years before she told anyone what happened, and, even then, she did not talk about it in much detail. At age 30, she still often thought about the assault, questioning what she could have done differently and blaming herself for not preventing it. Her belief that the rape was her fault prevented her from trusting herself with the men she met later. Whenever there was a man she liked, she fled as soon as he expressed an interest in getting emotionally or physically closer to her. She froze if a man asked her out or touched her, even in a friendly and nonsexual way. Over time, Linda grew increasingly frustrated with herself because she wanted to be able to develop a friendship or intimate relationship with a man.

What prevented Linda from being able to change, given her awareness? There are four things that can make a belief particularly hard to change:

- ◆ The strength of the feelings connected to the belief
- ◆ How essential the belief seems to your safety
- ◆ How much your past experiences have confirmed the belief
- ◆ Developing the belief at an early age

It is helpful to recognize, in advance, when a particular belief has one or more of these qualities. Sometimes you can take extra steps to help yourself deal with it. Coming up against a particularly change-resistant belief can be frustrating, but knowing why can help. One of the problems Linda encountered was the power of emotions.

1. Strong feelings can make beliefs extremely difficult to change. Beliefs learned through traumatic experience are usually attached to many feelings. Those

feelings can make the difference between a willingness to test a belief and an unwillingness to even think about testing it. This is not about being stubborn or closed-minded. It's about self-protection. Once you learn what is painful and what is pleasurable, you are likely to seek out pleasure and avoid pain. The feelings that prevent you from testing alternative beliefs are your way of protecting yourself from repeating an experience that brought you much pain. A part of you wants to be very careful and not let the same thing happen again.

Linda believed that the rape was her fault. The following feelings arose from this belief.

Belief	Feelings
"The rape was my fault."	Low self-esteem, self-blame, self-loathing, self-doubt, fear, feeling vulnerable, out of control, powerless

Linda's fear and bad feelings about herself remained powerful. Although she wanted closeness, her need for self-protection was even greater. She realized that developing a close relationship would require some risk on her part, as all relationships do, but she needed to find ways of developing more closeness without feeling too frightened or unsafe. She learned that she could take actions to help her feel safer when getting to know someone. For example, when she was first getting to know someone, she could meet in a public place during the daytime and drive her own car. Later, she could try double-dating with a trusted girlfriend. These strategies helped her feel less frightened and more confident.

Feelings are an important part of what can sustain your beliefs. Emotions such as self-blame generate negative thoughts that lead to even more negative emotions. This negative emotion-thought cycle is a major obstacle to self-understanding, developing relationships with other people, and, ultimately, to change. Try to notice the things that you say to yourself. These automatic thoughts reflect the underlying beliefs that influence how you feel and act. Linda repeats to herself the messages that "the rape was my fault," "I can't trust myself," and "something is wrong with me." The more she says these things to herself, the more strongly she believes them. The bad feelings grow stronger too. Preparing and using affirmations are one way to give yourself immediate help.

We talked about affirmations in the Prologue. These can help counteract negative automatic thoughts and the feelings that go with them. Affirmations cannot by themselves help Linda trust herself again, but they can help her deal with the powerful feelings of self-blame and low self-worth that overwhelm her when anyone starts to get close. In advance she prepared the following affirmation to help override the negative thoughts: "I'm not perfect but I still deserve love and respect." Becoming aware of your negative automatic thoughts allows you to develop more positive statements that directly counter the old ones.

2. Beliefs are held most firmly when they seem essential to your safety.

⌘ *Lyle is afraid to disagree. As a child, he was hit when he disagreed with his parents. Now he believes that to be safe he must agree.*

Lyle's reason for believing that he must agree in order to be safe was real. But Lyle is no longer a child. Many other things have changed and it's been a long time since Lyle checked how accurate his fear is. Is the risk of testing his belief still the same as when he was a child? Recognizing that the answer is no makes the idea of testing the belief seem more possible. It also helps to realize that testing beliefs doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing process. There are many gradations of risk. Lyle's first experiment would probably *not* be disagreeing with his boss. The stakes might be too high, the power difference too great. Lyle could begin by trying small experiments in his life to test whether his belief is always, never, or sometimes true. For example, he might begin by disagreeing with a trusted friend about where to go out for dinner. When the friend suggests Chinese food, Lyle might be more in the mood for Italian. He could speak up with his friend and watch the results. Later, he could try something that felt a tiny bit riskier. Safety is the first, most important need to consider. Beliefs connected with safety are also among the hardest to change.

3. Beliefs grow stronger with experiences of their accuracy. The more your beliefs are confirmed, the stronger they become. This was true for Lyle and it was also true for Rita.

⌘ *As a child, Rita was repeatedly treated with respect when she offered her opinions at family meetings. Her parents listened carefully to what she had to say, and they considered her opinion when making certain decisions. She now believes it is good to express herself openly and she believes people will listen to her. She is now an outspoken attorney.*

Rita's beliefs are strong because of the accumulated weight of her experience that they are accurate. If, like Lyle, Rita's experience had led her to strongly believe, "People don't want to hear about my opinions," she might not risk finding out how accurate that belief is. Without contrary experiences, beliefs will not change. This is why it is important to consider testing your beliefs in low-risk ways. The stronger your beliefs the more countering experiences it will probably take to change them.

4. Beliefs developed at an early age are harder to change. Generally, the younger you are when you develop a particular belief, the more difficult it is to change later. This is true whether or not the belief is connected to a trauma. The younger you are when you suffer trauma, the fewer prior experiences you will have had to counter its impact. Furthermore, because of a child's developing nervous sys-

tem, trauma has a greater physical impact on children than on adults. In the earlier example, Lyle's belief that safety required agreement was strong for three reasons: First, the belief concerned his essential safety. Second, the belief was confirmed by many family experiences. Third, the belief developed when he was a child. He could not know that his parents' response to him was not typical of the way others would respond.

To summarize, beliefs can be hard to change when the emotions attached to them are strong, when the risk for testing them feels very high, when you have had many experiences confirming they are true, and when you were very young when you started believing them.

Facilitating Change in Beliefs

How can you change difficult-to-change beliefs? You can begin by thinking through what you feel, think, and believe about safety. The following may help you think about each of the four difficulties above in ways that can make change a little bit easier.

1. Emotions can be strong and should never be ignored, but they aren't always about here-and-now "facts." Self-comforting and self-care techniques can help lessen your emotional discomfort. It is okay to go slowly and at your own emotional pace.
2. Don't take risks that feel too dangerous. Start with small risks. Chapter 4, on safety, talks more about levels and degrees of risk.
3. The more confirming experiences you have, the stronger the belief. However, be sure to ask yourself if the situation is still similar to those confirming experiences. What circumstances may have changed? How long has it been since you even tried to see if the belief is still accurate? The last time you tried, were you paying attention with an open mind?

Beliefs can be hard to change. Be forgiving of yourself when change does not come as easily as you think it should. Remind yourself that you are experiencing normal, predictable posttrauma challenges. Be patient as you work toward feeling better.

You will find another self-care exercise in Box 3.3. This guided relaxation ends with a mindfulness exercise. Having several options for ways to relax will help you find the approach that works best for you. We suggest that you first read through the script to familiarize yourself with it. You may be able to do the exercise from memory. However, it may be easier to record it yourself or ask someone whose voice you find soothing to record it for you. You can then play it back whenever you wish. Take time out now to relax or do something nice for yourself. This can be something that takes only a few moments—such as imagining a peaceful scene—or a longer activity like a hot bath or a walk.

BOX 3.3. Time Out to Relax

Begin by making yourself as comfortable as possible in a chair. Place your feet flat on the ground. Make sure that your arms are firmly supported either in your lap or on the arms of the chair. Make sure that your head is fully supported by your neck.

Now, I'd like you to relax your body as much as you can. Sit comfortably and just let go of any tension that you are feeling in your body. Take a deep breath (*breathe*), and let the tension flow out as you exhale (*let out the air*). Take another deep breath and just breathe out all your tension. One more deep breath (*breathe*) ... and let it go.

Now let a warm feeling of relaxation flow into your body. Focus on your breathing. Become aware of your breath flowing in and out. Feel your chest rising and falling with each breath. Breathe naturally and smoothly. Feel the air flow into your body and leave it with each breath. Become aware of how your body feels as you sit comfortably in your chair. Experience the feeling of the ground under your feet.

Now feel the weight of your body where it touches the chair, and become aware of the support you feel from the back of your chair. Just become very aware of how your body feels right at this moment, with your breath gently flowing in and out.

Now, move your attention to your feet. Become aware of any tension that you may feel in your feet. Then just mentally try to relax that area. Let the tension flow out of your body. Feel your feet relaxed and warm. And then move your attention to your ankles. Experience the sensations in that part of your body. And as you become aware of any tension there, see if you can let that tension flow out of your body with your breath. Just mentally ask those muscles to relax. Feel that tension being replaced by a warm feeling of relaxation.

And then move your attention up your legs to your calves. Notice if there is any tension there. And if you feel any, see if you can just let it go. Gently release those muscles and become aware of a feeling of relaxation in that area.

Now move your awareness to your knees. And notice any sensations you may find there. If you become aware of any tension, just let it go. And do the same thing in the area of your thighs. Mentally check that area for tension. If tension is found there, just let it go ... just breathe it out with each breath. And let a warm feeling of relaxation flow into your thigh area.

Now move your awareness up to your hips. And again, become aware of any sensation in that area. And let it go. If you find that tension remains in a particular area, don't worry about it. Just leave it and move on to the next area. So now focus your attention on your lower abdomen and buttocks. Try and relax those areas. Just let the tension flow out of your body. Do the same in your stomach area and be aware that it is common to hold a lot of tension there. You may find many sensations in your stomach. So

(cont.)

BOX 3.3 (cont.)

just mentally tell those muscles to relax and see if you can feel the tension leaving your body.

Now bring your awareness to your lower back. Feel that area and experience the feelings there. If there is tightness in the muscles, try to relax them. Just try to let go of that tension. Do the same in your chest area. Be aware of any tightness. Just breathe it out (*breathe*). Let it go. And let those feelings of tightness and tension be replaced by a warm feeling of relaxation. And then move your awareness to your upper back. Experience how it feels to lean against the chair. Feel that pressure against your back and see if there is any tension in that area. And again, if there is, just let it go.

And now move your attention to your hands and experience any sensations there, in your fingers, the palms of your hands, your wrists. If you feel any tension in these areas, release it with a deep cleansing breath. And become aware of any sensations in your forearms, elbows, and upper arms. Relax these areas. The hands and arms are used all the time throughout the day and this is a chance to rest them.

Now move your attention to your shoulders. See if there is tightness there. See if your muscles are held tightly. Take a breath and let some of the tension flow out of your body with that breath. The shoulders are another spot where people tend to carry a lot of tension. So, if you continue to experience tightness there, don't worry about it. Just move on to the area of your neck. Feel that area. Become aware of any sensations there. Let go of any tension. Now bring your awareness to your chin. Mentally release those muscles to relax gently. And so, too, the muscles of your lips, your cheeks, your tongue. Just breathe all of that tension right out of your body.

Then check your eyes. See if there is any tightness in that area. Then check the muscles around your temples and your ears. Just feel the area in your forehead and let go of any of the tension you may find there. Mentally examine the back of your head, right on up to the top of your head. See if there is any tension that you may be holding in your scalp. Then just let that tension be replaced by a warm wave of relaxation.

And now, become aware of how your entire body feels. See if you can become aware of the very warm, relaxed feeling beginning in your toes and reaching right to the top of your head. Again, experience the weight of your body firmly supported by your chair. Experience how your feet feel firmly touching the ground, gently supported by the earth. Feel your head, securely supported by your neck. Become aware of any areas of tension remaining in your body. Just acknowledge them and don't worry about them. Experience the warm, relaxed feeling throughout your body. Feel a comfortable, warm heaviness as you sit securely supported in your chair.

Now I would like you to return your attention to your breathing. While you remain as relaxed as possible, once again become aware of your breath entering and leaving your body. Become aware of the gentle rise and fall of your chest with each breath.

Become aware of the air entering through your nostrils or mouth and the feeling of that warm air as it leaves your body. Just continue to breathe naturally and gently. Become aware of the gentle rhythm of your breath, flowing in and then flowing out of your body.

Now, as you continue breathing and remain relaxed, I would like you to think of a word or a sound or a phrase that has a peaceful meaning to you. It could be a word such as *peace* or *love* or *God*. You might also choose a neutral word such as *one*. Take a minute to think of a word or phrase that has a calming and peaceful feeling to you.

(Pause.)

Now that you have selected your word or phrase, begin silently repeating your word or phrase as you exhale. As you breathe in, feel the air enter your body. As you breathe out, silently repeat your word. Continue doing this for a few minutes. As you find your mind wandering, simply bring your attention back to your breathing and back to your word. It is inevitable that distracting thoughts will arise. In fact, it is very common to find that your mind has wandered for several minutes. But don't let that bother you. Just remember to bring your attention, once again, back to your breathing. Remember not to judge your performance. This exercise does not have to be done perfectly. It does not have to be done expertly or skillfully. All you have to do is do it to the best of your ability. It will still be effective. So just continue breathing naturally and gently. Continue repeating your word or phrase as you exhale. Now practice this exercise in silence for several minutes.

(Pause.)

When you feel ready, gently open your eyes. You will feel calm and relaxed. You are now ready to continue your day, begin or continue work in your workbook, or turn your attention to a new activity.

Developed by Carol Reinert, MA, LCDP, and Dena Rosenbloom, PhD. Used with permission.