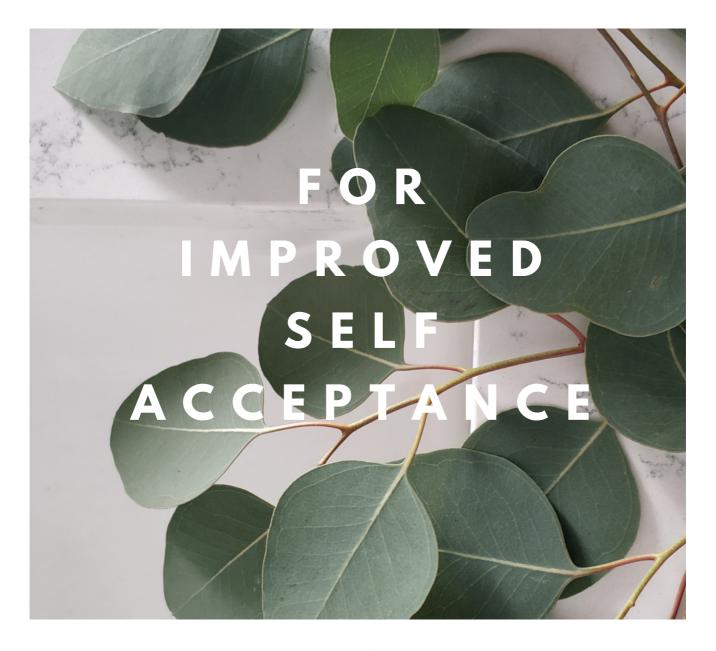
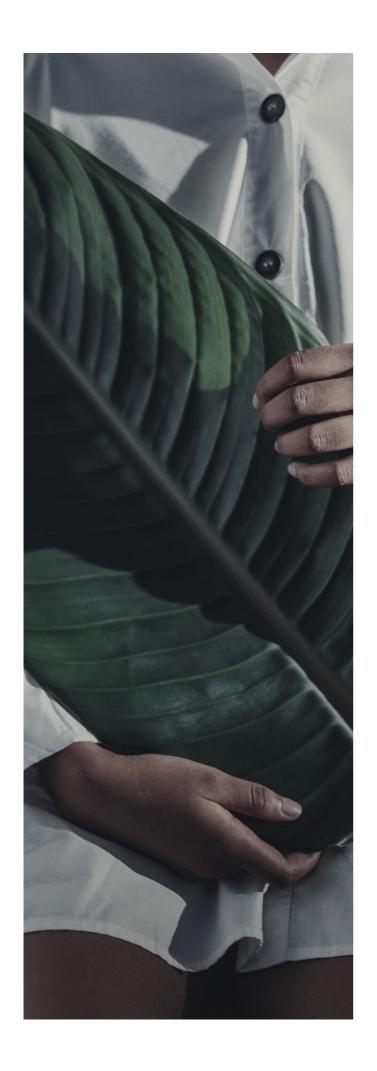
BODY IMAGE HEALING GUIDE







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The Basis of Psychological Healing, Growth and Change

None of what is written on the next few pages is about body image healing directly. Which does, you may consider, make it a very odd place for me to begin. However, in my opinion, the following chapter may actually be one of the most important parts of this whole pamphlet. I urge you to try your best to engage with it as closely as you can.

In short, the following chapter details everything that I have come to learn about what most psychological therapy primarily targets: our own self-perception. In my view, understanding the following concepts is integral to our understanding of how to heal, change, or grow our mindsets from ones that are self-critical, to ones that are nurturing and kind.

From the day we are born, our brain is attempting to make predictions and generalisations about the way the world is, who we are and our role in it. This is so it can best navigate how to act in that world to keep us safe and enable us to survive.

Since our brains don't actually have direct access to reality and don't know objectively what the world is like, they do their best to interpret the experiences of our lives and build up a model that we can use to make effective predictions to keep us safe. And this acts as a sort of filter through which our consciousness experiences reality. I know that all sounds a little bit wacky, but please do keep reading!

This considered, we can be clear about one thing: the only thing that matters to our brains is preserving our safety in the moment - irrespective of the accuracy what the brain is perceiving. Thus, we are primed to more heavily value staying alive and safe 'in the moment', than doing that action which may bring happiness down the line. In short, our brains will do their best to perceive the world in a way that keeps us away from pain and potential unsafety. We are literally programmed to discomfort avoid, and, in many situations, this is tremendously useful.

This does, however, become problematic in the 21-century, since (depending on where we live in the world) thankfully we are **no longer experiencing the constant or true threat of unsafety** due from our external environment (like we used to in times past). Nowadays, many more our problems are menial and internal. I don't say that in order to invalidate your experience. I promise. I say it in order to help you perceive your fear differently: It is unlikely that the things you worry about or are scared of can actually physically hurt you.

We come full circle to that idea outlined just a few moments ago: the only thing that matters to our brains is preserving our safety in the moment and away from potential pain. So, because our brains don't know that most of our current fears are not 'true threats', we so often avoid making very necessary changes based on inaccurate perceptions.

So, what does this all mean for our healing? As we've established, over time, a model of the world is composed of beliefs and generalisations about who we are or what the world is like. These constructs drive all of our thoughts, emotions and actions.

This is like an inner compass. It is deep, ingrained and quite unconscious 'knowledge'. I ask you to consider, then, that could this by why all of the changes that you try to make at a conscious level (whether this be changing thought patterns, feelings, or using 'willpower' to change behaviours) are unsuccessful? Could it be that what is really driving your choices, thoughts, actions, feelings, perceptions and results are all of the more deeply ingrained beliefs and stored generalisations that are likely inaccurate and geared towards preserving current 'safety' from perceived threats? If your perception is coming from inaccurate 'lines of code' that you have input into your head and are deeply ingrained - it is feasible that your mental operating system is limiting you based on incorrect perceptions and beliefs that you have learnt, rather than absolute fact?

And this is where it all comes together quite neatly and is exactly why almost all of the therapeutic processes that are geared towards psychological development, growth or change (CBT, for example) are based on changing our perceptions of ourselves. They aim to shift our inner ideologies.

In order to heal, I believe that we must transform our core perception of ourselves and the world into ones that are more true than they currently are. As the next chapter details, changing our perception of ourselves and our world is not easy work. However, identifying how or where our beliefs and our inner model comes from is a great place to start. With time, support and determination, you can achieve an accurate and constructive perception of yourself that ensures freedom from your current limiting beliefs.



The Route of Our Self Perception

How frequently do you hear somebody say:

"I feel perfectly ok with my body"

My guess is... not all too often. Now, how about something along the lines of:

"My thighs touch",

"My bum is too flat",

"My stomach is too big",

"I'm getting wrinkles on my face".

More often. I bet. And the more you begin to search for it, the more omnipresent you realise it is. It seems like nearly everyone has something they don't like about their body, and are yearning to change.

Although this does seem to be the case, saying 'everyone' is actually an overgeneralisation. There is, in reality, a **whole demographic** who exist amoung us who are entirely unaffected by body image concerns. Before I tell you who it is, I ask you to guess.

Hint: it is a gift to witness their interactions with mirrors: they are simply delighted to see themselves.









Babies!

Aside from those photos bringing a smile to your face, I am keen for you to take a good look at those photos because want you to see **visual evidence** of the one crucial fact:

You were not born disliking our body.

This gives us two other valuable pieces of information that should inspire confidence of your potential freedom from what you are feeling now:

- 1) Hating your body is a learnt behaviour.
- 2) Unlearning and relearning will be how you heal.

A question that is useful to consider when beginning body image healing work, therefore, is:

What happened between now and when you were a baby that taught you this information?

Why is it that we no longer look at ourselves with the same level of non-judgemental joy that a baby does?

The answers to that will be nuanced and vary from person to person. One thing is indisputable, however. Over the course of your life, you will have been **conditioned to think that your unsuppressed body is not good enough as it is.** You have learned that there is something "wrong" with your body.

I want to spend a little while going into this, before we move onto actionable exit routes from body image turmoil. So, let's begin: where does your self perception come from?

FAMILY

Though it is no fault of their own (since they have been affected by wider societal influences themselves), when we have parents or close relatives who are constantly trying to "manage their weight" or are upholding specific beauty ideals, it's likely they passed along these ideologies on to us.

Perhaps they made comments or judgements about our body or food choices as we were growing. Perhaps they put restrictions on what we were allowed to eat, and labelled food as "good" or "bad". Or, perhaps, we were just witnesses to self-deprecating comments about their own bodies, their weight, or their food choices. Sadly, the latter still has a monumental affect.



As children, we are like sponges. Our brains (unconsciously) absorb information provided by our surroundings incase it may, one day, come in handy and keep us safe. For some things, this is really useful! We observe and we learn. For things we so often observe and learn about our body, though, it isn't.

Though this observation may not result in us directly copying what's being modelled infront of us in that moment, belief systems and ideologies unconsciously ingrain nevertheless. Since our unconscious mind (where all of our information is stored) is like our inner Sat-Nav that guides our behaviours, we act according to the "acceptable" ways that we have internalised. Often, this means that we:

- speak to ourselves unkindly,
- consistently attempt to shrink ourselves via restricting our intake,
- demonise foods, labelling them as 'good' or 'bad',
- We move our bodies in ways that we do not enjoy.

PUBLIC FIGURES

The same concept applies for the people who we are "influenced" by on a daily basis, despite not ever having met them. If a popular, 'beautiful' film star, for example, is the face of an anti-wrinkle cream, we are automatically going to assume that wrinkles are the antithesis of beauty. If sports apparel companies are only using thin women to market their their clothing, we gradually begin to correlate thinness and fitness. And so on.

Even though nobody is explicitly saying: young is beautiful, or thin is fit, it is **implicitly** suggested. Each day, we see this over and over and over again. That means, each year, we get this message thousands upon thousands of times. This belief becomes so strong, that in time, we don't even question it. It is just how we think the world is. We are sold a lie, and since the sales pitch is backed by billion of pound industries that profit off our own dissatisfaction with ourselves, it is convincing. We are effectively marketed a different body and we buy it.

Additional to what our brains pick up from consistent visual marketing, we also hear conversations about influencers because they are in the public eye. In time, we learn that their bodies are something to be admired, something to strive for, and certainly something that is valued by those closest to us.

Whilst these conversations are certainly of influence to the negative relationship we have with our bodies, the people having them can't be blamed. They are also raised in this thin-obsessed culture that celebrates a "slender, flawless" body over an authentically healthy one.

TV SHOWS/PRESS ETC

Additional to the individuals influencing our beliefs of our bodies, the broader media play a large role in disseminating beliefs about cultural ideals and "norms". Think of the faces on the front covers of magazines. Think of the actors in movies. Think of the headlines of articles. Now, add them up.

Is it a surprise that you've come to hold the views that you've come to hold about "ideals", beauty and weight? There are 2 studies that I want to use to truly emphasise this point:

First, A 2014 study published in the International Journal of Eating Disorders that looked at the number of weight- stigmatising incidents in TV shows for young people.

(50%) of the 30 episodes analyzed contained at least one weight-stigmatizing incident. This means, that as a child, if you watched ten TV shows per week, more than 5 of those would be planting a seed of body image concern.

From the moments we begin to comprehend speech, we pick up on these narratives:

Some bodies are good. 11

Some bodies are bad.

THE MEDIA (cont)

And some of these seeds are *extremely* subtly planted. The example the jumps to mind for me from my childhood is the character of Harper, from Disney's 'Wizard's of Waverley Place'. I think I watched that every day for a couple of years. Harper was the goofy, awkward friend. She also happened to be a few sizes bigger than the protagonist. Time and time again we see this same. Think Ralph from the Simpsons. Dudley Dursley from Harry Potter. The more you reflect on these implicit suggestions, the more you will begin to realise that you have been absorbing the following message for your entire life: a smaller body is a more desirable body that helps you fit in better.

The second, A study outlined in the 2009 Harvard Gazette describing how Fijian girls succumbed to Western dysmorphia with exposure to television.

Before TV was common in Fiji, the female beauty ideal was that of a heavier, more robust frame. Many factors, like the culture's history, current circumstances and values, will have combined to determine what it deemed as an "ideal" or "acceptable" body.

However, once televisions became more of a commonplace household item, Fijian's (in particular young Fijian girls), began to idolise the thin bodies of the actors in the TV shows they began watching.

There was a shift in beauty standard and a surge in eating disorder cases. People strived to look like the actors on TV.

IMPAIRED FUNCTION

A final area to discuss is slightly different: A lack of bodily acceptance due to way that the body functions, or does not function.

This is often a very challenging and sensitive area, that I view a an aspect of acceptance that we may have to work on throughout our lives, rather than 'fix' and move on from.

When an individual is dealing with an injury, chronic illness, or 'failing' of their body, it often **generates the feeling that their body is against them.** The experience of living in that body (which they expect more from, and perhaps that has shortcomings drawn attention to) can become very painful and exhausting. From this, a form of resentment can grow.

What can be helpful in this case is to realise one single truth:

Your body is doing the best is can.

If you are working on body acceptance whilst living with impaired function (be this temporary or chronic), it is always encouraged that you address the limitations of your body, rather than resisting them. This can aid alleviating the expectation for them to be, or act differently right now. This concept - simply acknowledging 'what is' - is sometimes referred to as radical acceptance. It is hard but essential work.



A SHORT WORD ON TRAUMA

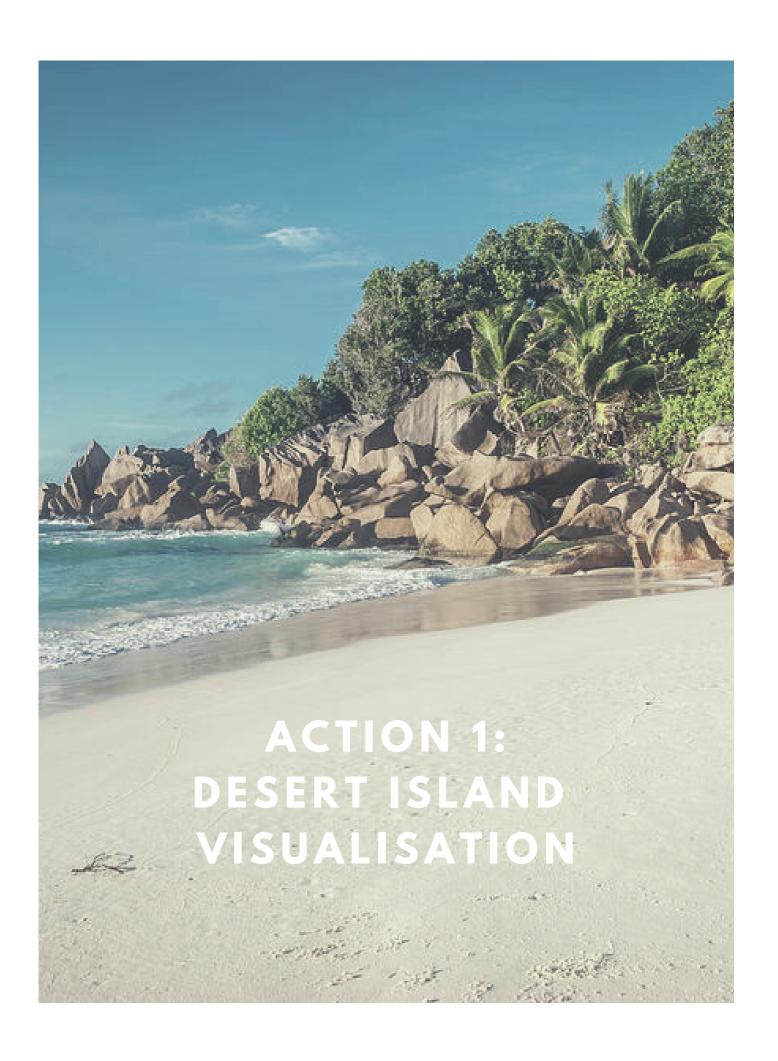
Though the scope of this resource does not extend to work on trauma, I do want to acknowledge how, in some cases, dangerous or frightening experience may lead to resistance towards bodily change. One example of this might be if some form of abuse has taken place in one body type, an individual may fear returning to the body type in fear of it recurring. In these cases, please seek trauma therapy. This resource will fall far short of the support you need.



ACCUMULATIVE EFFECT

In short, the reason we are concerned with our body image is because we receive **messages that they are "wrong"** from the moment we can comprehend words. Body hatred is in the air we breathe. The songs we hear. The adverts we read and the conversations we have. Add these together, and it is a recipe for utter personal dissatisfaction.

After the seed is sown, and we begin practicing the behaviours, our brains watch and learn. With repetition of these behaviours, we consolidate our belief systems until the point they are unwavering. We believe we have our truth. Our bodies need changing in order to be adequate.

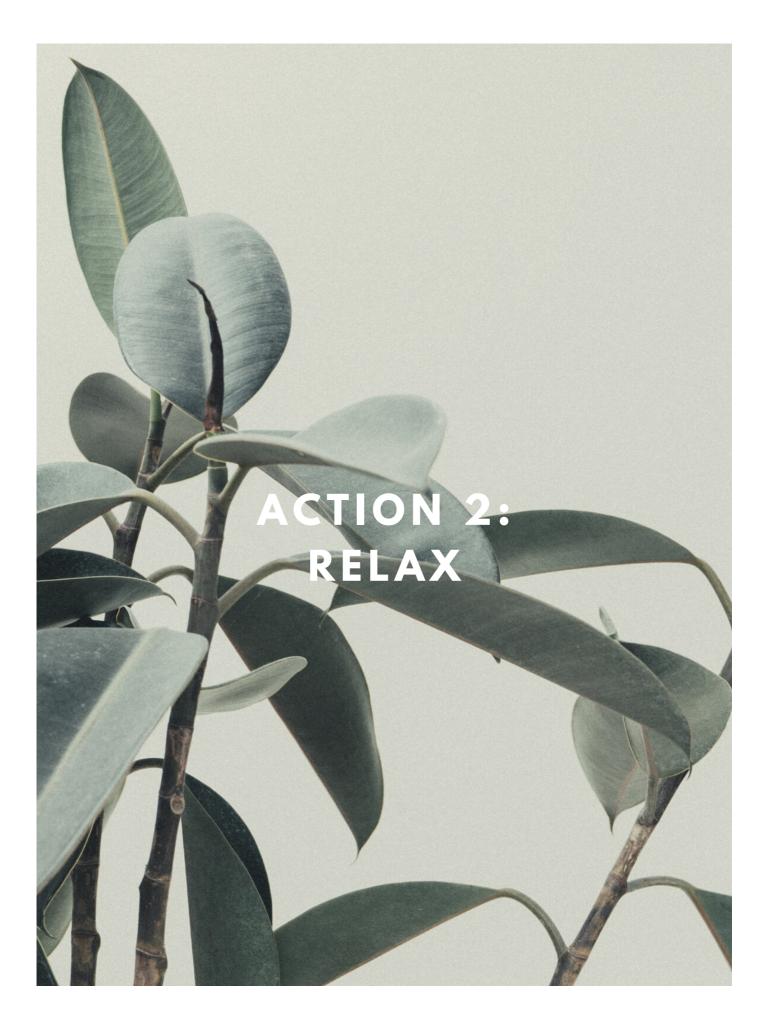


This visualisation exercise is one that I hope will demonstrate the beliefs and judgements you have about what is the "correct" body for you to reside in. It is an exploration of self-expectation and biases.

STEPS

- 1) Set aside some time where you can sit uninterrupted for about 10 minutes. Make sure that wherever you are sitting is comfortable. Grab a notebook and pen.
- 2) When you are ready, allow your eyes to rest. Do your best to calm your breathing.
- 3) With your eyes closed and body relaxed, imagine yourself on a tropical desert island. See, hear and smell whatever you imagine in all of the intensity you can muster.
- 4) Imagine that you've grown up on this island, entirely alone and subsequently have never seen anybody else before. Hence, thereis nobody to compare yourself to.
- 5) As you imagine yourself there, perhaps sitting on the sand or wading in the water, consider how you feel about your body: What do you think of it? How do you feel within it? What expectations of it do you have? What parts of it do you value? How do you feed yourself in order to carry out your daily tasks? What forms of movement do you participate in and why do you do them?

Feel free to jot any thoughts and feelings down.



This exercise may feel a little overly simple. Nevertheless, I urge you still to give it a committed attempt or five. When you actually give it a try, it may be harder than you perceive it will be

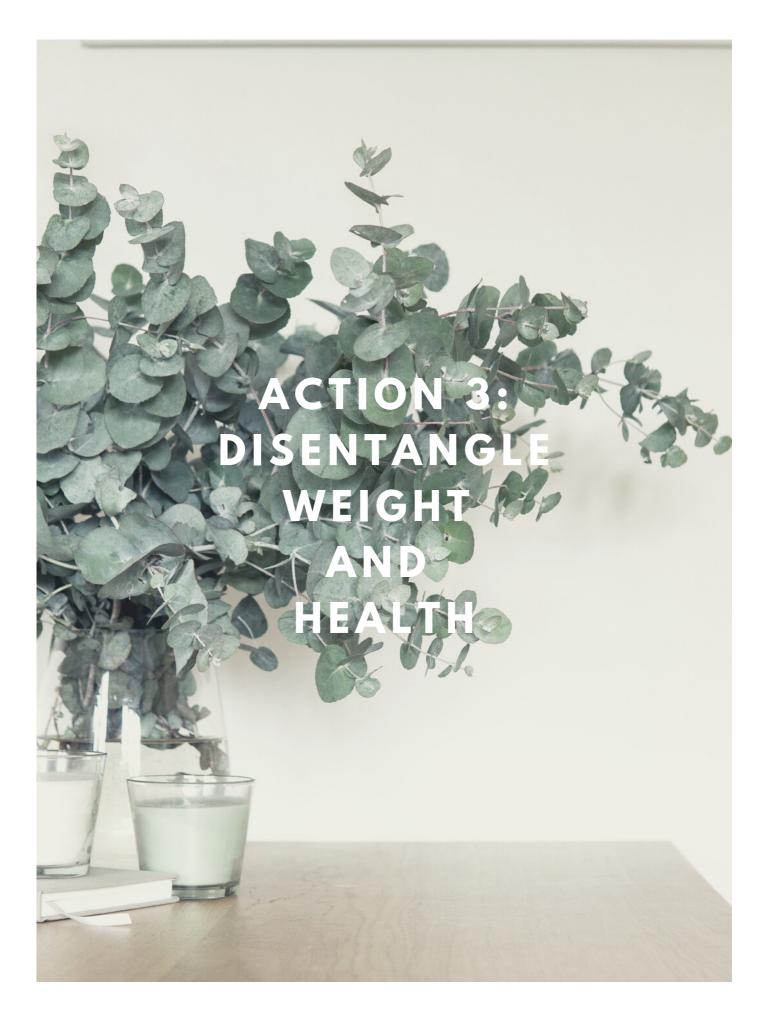
STEPS

- 1) Next time you are experiencing particularly harsh body image critique, do your best to shift your state of thinking and being.
- 2) If you are standing, sit.If you are breathing quickly, slow your breath right down.If your shoulders are raised and tensed, lower and relax them.
- 3) Scan your entire body and seek which muscles require your focus. Spend time on relaxing them.

This is important because when we tune into our bodies, we allow space for our emotions to become fluid. This, in turn, is effective because emotions are energy, and energy wants to flow.

When you can begin to identify emotion and separate it from its ability to drive your behaviour, you will begin to feel more in control of your ability to move past certain feelings.

When you are experiencing negative emotions, you must give yourself space to observe them. However, there is a difference between witnessing them, and getting entangled in them. As soon as you begin ruminating on them and creating a story around them, you give them more power. Accept their presence and then let them flow.



The link you have in your head between a small body and health (and a larger body and ill health) is one that requires direct confrontation if you are hoping to fully heal. We must understand that letting our bodies settle at their unsuppressed place is not 'anti-health'. Actually, it's quite the opposite. In this exercise, you will consider what health actually means to you. I like to imagine the aspects of our overall health to be like the segments of an orange. Each segment makes up one, small, singular part of our 'whole' health. For further reading on this topic, check out the resources on p.31

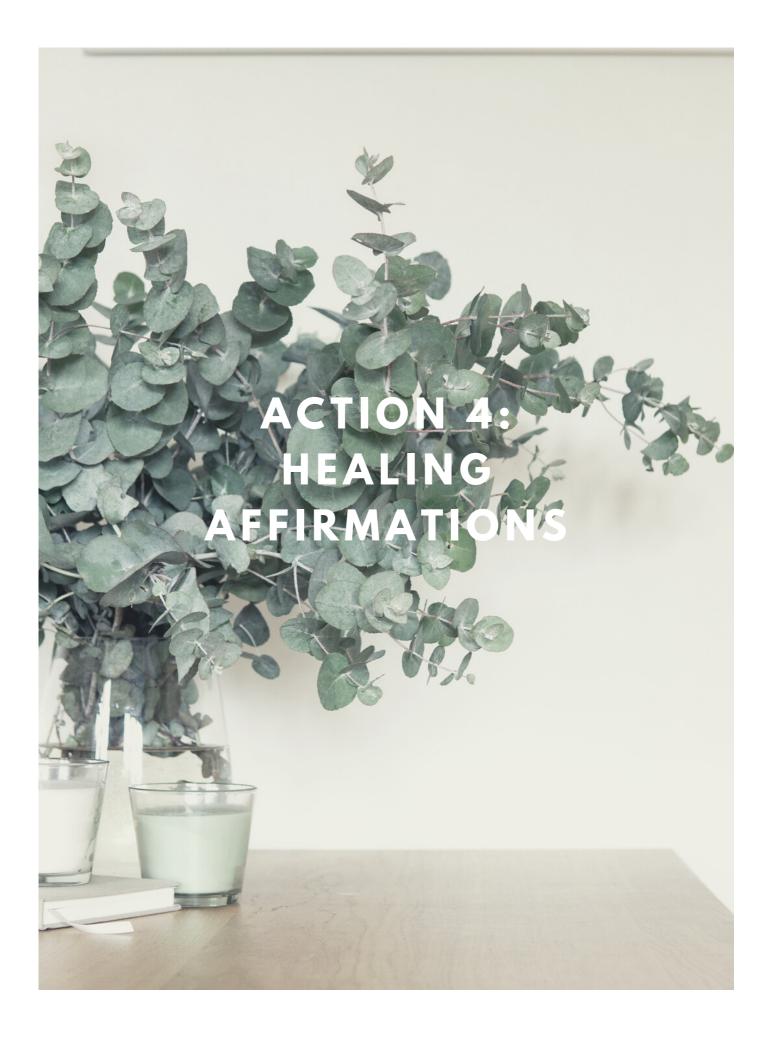
STEPS

- 1) Look at the two diagrams on page 21.
- 2) Grab a note pad and pen. Note down all of the 'realities' of health on one side.
- 3) Consider how "healthy" you **genuinely** are <u>when you are</u> <u>suppressing your weight</u> due to body image concerns. This reflection could take anywhere between 5 30 minutes









AFFIRMATIONS (sometimes referred to as mantras) have been used for thousand and thousands of years. When something has been used for thousands and thousands of years, there's probably a good reason for it!

I won't go on too long about it, but incase you're interested...

The word 'Mantra', comprised of "man'- "mind" and "tra- "tool or instrument," derives from the ancient Hindu language of Sanskrit. Mantras have long been utilised as mechanisms to calm the mind and shift perceptions in these cultures, and far beyond. The words used within affirmations are of vital importance. However, the repetition and corresponding associations of certain sound patterns can also induce our brains into feeling a productive sense of peace, irrespective of what the words themselves actually are. Think of a TV advert jingle. It isn't always the words we remember, but rhythm. These rhythms make us feel something too.

HOW DO WE USE THESE MIND TOOLS?

In short, we need 3 things. Repetition, conviction and corresponding actions which imply that we believe them (even if we don't). By frequently saying them and living by them as much as we can, new neural pathways in our brain can form new, positive associations. Just as our brains have picked up negative perceptions of unsuppressed bodies in the past, they can and will adopt new ones with enough persistence.

But, I get it. It feels awkward. It feels forced. It feels like you are saying things out loud that you don't actually believe in, despite wishing to. Irrespective of your uncertainty and no matter how testing you find it, I urge you to stick with it for at least a 3 weeks. In these weeks, my suggestion is to set aside 10 minutes per day to recite a list of affirmations with that resonate most with you.

Though it won't be an overnight change, words have real power to transform our internal monologue, perspective, beliefs and thought patterns. By repeating mantras on a daily basis, we can solidify goals, transform associations and perhaps most importantly, also influence how we naturally speak to ourselves. The gradual reprogramming of our subconscious mind is increasingly being recognised as what lies behind all healing. This repetition is a non invasive method to assist with this reprogramming of our self-perception.

Cognitive neuroscientists believe 5% of our cognitive activities (decisions, emotions, actions, behaviours) are conscious whereas the remaining 95% are generated in a non-conscious manner. This just emphasises how important it is to shift our ingrained self-perceptions, rather than just try to consciously think ourselves out of mental turmoil.

Some examples of mantras that you may wish to incorporate into your daily route are on the next page. Feel free to edit them so that they feel more personal and applicable to your own healing.



I DO NOT HAVE TO LOVE MY BODY. I HAVE TO LOVE THE LIFE MY BODY ALLOWS ME TO LIVE

I DO NOT HAVE TO LOVE MY BODY IN ORDER TO RESPECT IT

WHAT MY BODY LOOKS LIKE IS THE LEAST INTERESTING THING ABOUT ME

PEOPLE SPEND TIME WITH ME, NOT MY BODY PARTS.

IF I CAN ONLY SUSTAIN MY CURRENT WEIGHT BY RESTRICTING FOOD, THEN IT'S NOT THE RIGHT WEIGHT.

MY BODY IS INNOCENT

MY BODY IS HEALING

I AM GRATEFUL TO HAVE A BODY

THIS IS MY BODY

MY BODY WAS NEVER THE PROBLEM

I RELEASE ALL JUDGEMENT TOWARDS MY BODY

I AM MORE THAN A BODY

MY SHAPE DOES NOT = MY WORTH

MY BODY IS A VEHICLE TO GET ME FROM A - B

MY BODY IS A VESSEL FOR MY EMOTIONS AND MY PERSONALITY

I AM WHOLE.

I AM ENOUGH

MY LEGS ARE MY GREATEST SUPPORTERS

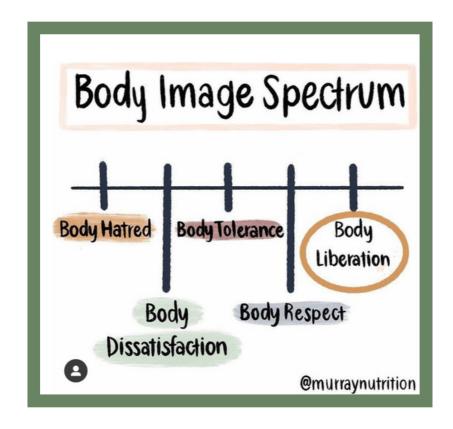
MY ARMS ARE ALWAYS BY MY SIDE



One last thing to note...

keep in mind that you don't have to expect yourself to jump straight from body dissatisfaction to love. Instead, my suggestion is **shoot for neutrality first**.

This means having acceptance of how your body looks at it's unsuppressed, giving it no meaning 'good', or 'bad', and focusing on your life instead. You can be life positive, body neutral and work your way up that body image spectrum.







Of all the media platforms, social media has the greatest influence on our lives these days. Yes, it has its many negatives, but like everything in life - it has its positive side too. Let's begin there. Social media, when curated to your advantage, can be a place of respite, motivation, and camaraderie on the body acceptance path. We can connect with people who have been where we are and have wonderful advice and productive reassurance to give. However, it takes some intention to make it this way.

TIPS TO CREATE A SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE:

- 1) Set aside some time where you can look at who you 'follow'. Unfollow those who provide advice that doesn't correspond with the mindset you are wishing to curate.
- 2) "Hide" or "report" ads: click those three dots in the corner of any diet or fitness ad you see so that eventually none of them will show up in your feed. If you have to explain your reason for reporting them, select the 'scam' option. Being sold a diet or body type is a hoax.
- 3) Follow accounts and pages that inspire you. Follow accounts of people who are promoting body acceptance and neutrality. Follow the people who lift you up, who after reading their posts or browsing the visuals on their feed you feel better about yourself after. Follow people who look like regular people, or those who are glamorous but don't tell you that this is how you should look, or try to sell you a way to achieve it. Seeing a range of people living a range of fulfilling lives can really, really help disentangle the correlation between peace, success and body size.

Replace the people who use diet culture buzzwords ("Paleo", "intermittent fast", "spot target" "cheat" "sculpt" etc), for those who discuss concepts such as...

body acceptance,
mindfulness,
self- acceptance,
weight-neutral health &
(genuine) intuitive eating.

You can search for hashtags like #bodyacceptance or #bodypositive for accounts to follow, but be cautious with this. Many people are using these hashtags because they are popular, not necessarily because they are true to the philosophy. If anyone is promoting weight loss, body alterations, or posting "before and after" photos - it's a good clue the account is not in alignment with body acceptance.

The purpose is to follow accounts that inspire or lift you up, not make you feel like you need to change your body in order to feel ok.

A few examples of safe space accounts are provided on page 32. Take what helps, leave what doesn't.



FINAL WORD

Consider how long you have been trying to change your body. How many times have you thought negative thoughts about your body? How many diets or exercise programs have you tried? How many negative comments have you been witness?

We don't need an exact number. We know it's a lot.

Thus, it's understandable that it's also going to take a while to rewire your brain into thinking differently about your body, relating differently to your body and treating your body differently.

Though completely healing body image is **absolutely possible**, it isn't a quick fix. It's a far cry from one of those "21 Days to a New You!" plans that promise a drastic shift in mindset within an impressively tolerable sounding length of time.

I am not going to lie to you here. This will be hard work. You will have weeks when you don't think you'll ever get 'there'. You most likely occasionally fall back into negative thought patterns after weeks of doing better. You will have times when you wonder if it is all worth it. And I am sorry for this - I know this isn't what you want to hear.

However, at the end of this journey lies freedom from it all. That is something I can assure you of. While it may take longer than you like to change old patterns, beliefs, and habits, this new way of being that you're creating - one that is more trusting, kind and intuitive, will bring you home to your authentic self, and enable you to live a life that is fulfilling.

Your meandering journey of body acceptance will allow you to reconnect with yourself. You will be your own guidance. Your own cheerleader. Your own supportive pal. Your own trustworthy friend. You will not only be better equipt to handle future body changes (because our body will change), but you will also be able to face life's other challenges, for body image freedom frees up mental space to pay attention to things that truly matter to us.

The path of body acceptance will lead you back to who you were before all the conditioning of the world had you believe that there was something "wrong" with your body.

YOU CAN EXPERIENCE THAT LOVE AND WORTHINESS WITHIN YOURSELF AGAIN WITHOUT YOUR BODY EVER HAVING TO BE DIFFERENT THAN IT IS WHEN IT IS AT ITS UNSUPPRESSED.



RESOURCES- FOR YOU

GENERAL HEALING BOOKS:

THE UNTETHERED SOUL BY MICHAEL SINGER

LOVING WHAT IS BY BYRON KATIE

THE MASTERY OF LIFE: A TOLTEC GUIDE TO PERSONAL FREEDOM BY DON MIGUEL RUIZ JR

RESOURCES ON WEIGHT AND HEALTH:

HEALTH AT EVERY SIZE BY LINDO BACON

ANTI-DIET BY CHRISTY HARRISON

HAES® HEALTH SHEETS (HAESHEALTHSHEETS.COM)

RESOURCES ON BODY IMAGE:

MORE THAN A BODY BY DR LEXIE KITE

BODY IMAGE WORKBOOK: AN EIGHT-STEP PROGRAM FOR LEARNING TO LIKE YOUR LOOKS BY THOMAS CASH

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION TO ADVANCE FAT ACCEPTANCE (NAAFA)
CHILD ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

NATIONAL EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION: DEVELOPING & MODELING POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

BEAUTY REDEFINED: RAISING CIRLS WITH BETTER BODY IMAGE: FAQS

HEALING SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

- @ALEXLIGHT_LDN
- @ALLISONKIMMEY
- @AMANDAALCOUNT
- @BEAUTY_REDEFINED
- @BEYONDBEAUTIFULBOOK
- @BODYCONFIDENTKIDS
- @CHR1STYHARRISON
- @COLLEENWERNER
- @CORYMUSCARA
- @DIETITIANANNA
- @DIETITIAN.RACHELGOODMAN
- @DRJOSHUAWOLRICH
- @FATPOSITIVEFERTILITY
- @FEELGOODDIETITIAN
- **@ISABELLADAVIS6**
- @JADEBEALLPHOTOGRAPHY
- **@KATIESTURINO**
- **@KENZIEBRENNA**
- @MEG.BOGGS
- @MYNAMEISJESSAMYN
- @SCHOOLOFSTRUT
- **@THEFUCKITDIET**
- **@THEINTUITIVE RD**
- **@THENUTRITIONTEA**
- **@VIRGIETOVAR**
- @YOGAFORALLBODIES

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GET IN TOUCH:

https://www.recover-ed.co.uk