

The background of the entire cover is a vibrant blue, overlaid with numerous stylized, flame-like or feather-like shapes in a bright red color. These shapes are scattered across the page, creating a dynamic and energetic visual texture.

JOSEPH V. CIARROCHI, PHD
LOUISE L. HAYES, PHD
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KATHARINE HALL

YOUR LIFE YOUR WAY

BASED ON
THE POPULAR
DNA-V
MODEL

ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT
THERAPY SKILLS TO HELP
TEENS MANAGE EMOTIONS
& BUILD RESILIENCE

**JOSEPH V. CIARROCHI
& LOUISE L. HAYES**

YOUR LIFE YOUR WAY

**SKILLS TO HELP TEENS MANAGE
EMOTIONS AND BUILD RESILIENCE**

ILLUSTRATED BY KATHARINE HALL



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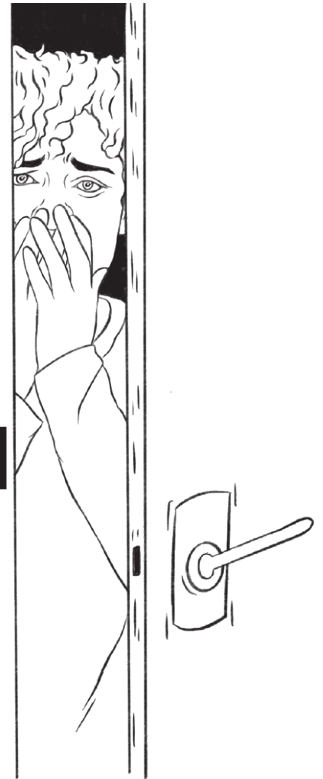


PART 2

FOCUSING YOUR SKILLS

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CHAPTER 9

WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN HURT, BEEN AFRAID, OR FEEL UNSAFE



But I understood, now, that we don't live only for ourselves. We're connected by millions of shared experiences and dreams and nightmares, all tied together with compassion. I learned that even when we're going through our darkest winter, spring is waiting to appear.

/ Laura Anderson Kurk, Glass Girl

Why You Might Read This Chapter

You're afraid, hurt, or feel unsafe.

You keep thinking about things that have hurt you.

You feel strong feelings about past events.

You're mean to yourself because of past events.

What You'll Learn

Why you might get stuck.

How to respond to being hurt and grow stronger.

How to take a BOLD view to better deal with strong emotions.

How to practice self-compassion.

If you're in the middle of a dark experience, this chapter will help you nurture yourself and find a way to live your life.

It will help you bring some compassion and caring to yourself. But first, we'll consider the things that happen to people that leave them feeling hurt, afraid, or unsafe.

Bad things happen—too often. Here are things young people often face. Have these happened to you?

- » Parents separating or leaving you
- » Bullying
- » Humiliation or embarrassment in a public setting
- » Betrayal by somebody you trusted
- » Being excluded by others
- » Discrimination based on your age, gender expression, ethnicity, or physical appearance
- » Neglect
- » Chronic illness
- » Bad accident
- » Physical assault
- » Tragedy in the family
- » Death of someone close to you
- » Sexual or physical abuse

Any of these events is likely to leave you feeling hurt, embarrassed, unsure of yourself, and even traumatized. If these experiences are happening, like many people you'll have strong emotions, feel unable to cope, lose sleep, get irritable or lash out, and feel wound up like a spring.

We want you to know you're not alone. Your experience is unique to you, but sadly, it's also common among humans. You can learn to equip yourself with the skills you need to manage these tough situations. You may doubt this, but research says the odds are on your side: you can lead a better life and live beyond your past, bad

experiences. If you don't get support for these past experiences, you may blame yourself and beat yourself up. By reading this chapter, you've taken the first big step toward getting support. You'll learn how to release yourself from past hurt and grow.

Before we begin, we want to remind you of two very important points:

- » It's not your fault if someone or something has hurt you.
- » You can grow into the person you secretly hope to be.

There's something else we know from the data: all creatures, including humans, have adapted to survive even the toughest challenges. Animals who face risk and survive get stronger. Humans do too. Whenever you face hard times and get through it, you get a little bit stronger. Researchers even have a word for this: it's called post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth happens when, despite adversity, you grow from that experience and use it to be stronger, wiser, and live a more valued life.

» WHY WE GET STUCK IN THESE EVENTS

When you face a threat, your DNA skills become hyper-ready to keep you safe. Your noticer and advisor are on alert to work out whether there's danger coming—sensing it and warning

you about it. Your discoverer gives you ways of quickly reacting to the danger, such as lashing out at others, withdrawing to safety, or avoiding certain places or situations.

Let's compare humans to zebras. A zebra will run when danger is present and relax when it's gone. Not humans. Humans can stay in fight-or-flight mode even when danger is gone. We can do this because we can use our advisor to replay and relive bad experiences. A zebra can't get stuck thinking about the lion he saw yesterday 20 miles away on a different plain. In contrast, tough experiences leave humans ruminating and stressed. We want to turn off our stress system, and if our body won't let us, then we get angry at it: we cut it, or burn it, or drug it, trying to stop the pain. Still, no matter what we do, we can't turn it off completely.

There's an alternative. You can learn to use your DNA skills to protect yourself when needed, and to live with fun and vitality when not needed. Over time, you can learn that your feelings and thoughts aren't the enemy.

» **GROWING YOUR COMPASSION**

You'll now do a few experiments to see how you can grow from your toughest experiences.

Think about something embarrassing from your past, but choose an event that you now think is no big deal. For example:

- » You mispronounced a word or used a meme incorrectly and people laughed.
- » You wore the wrong clothes to an event.
- » You said the wrong thing to someone.
- » You put your hand up and answered a question incorrectly.

Pause now and recall a small mistake that other people noticed. Have you got one? Take a moment to relive that event again, imagining you're right back there.

- » What happened inside your body at the time?
- » Did you feel embarrassed, silly, small, or something else?
- » What advice did you give yourself?
- » Did you tell yourself you were an idiot, or worthless, or something equally mean?
- » What action did you take? Did you remove yourself from the situation, mentally tune out, or something else?
- » Did you say that you felt embarrassed or stupid?
- » Did your advisor try to problem solve by telling you not to be so stupid again, like most people's advisor does?
- » Did you then create a feeling of shame, so you wouldn't act so dumb again? Most people do that too.

The problem comes when you carry that feeling of shame into other parts of your life. Did you do that too? Did you stop making jokes, or stop putting your hand up? Did you avoid making all mistakes? That's the problem. A life without mistakes is a life without learning.

Let's try two steps to get unstuck.

Step 1. Ground Yourself with a BOLD View

Here is the foundation step that can help you reclaim your life. This is useful when the hurt or danger is in the past (if you're still being hurt, ask for help from a trusted person). Research shows that people who continue to avoid their own thoughts and feelings continue to experience pain, while people who open up to their inner

selves, with a practice like the one that follows, can learn to carry their experiences and grow. This practice looks simple—so simple you might not think it works. Try it. It does. We call this practice “BOLD View.” It is an alternative to the ACT noticer skill we taught you in chapter 2. Try it when you have difficult memories that make you feel scared, overwhelmed by emotion, or distressed.

- » **Breathe:** Take a few slow, deep breaths. Your breath is the key to reclaiming your body.
- » **Observe:** Notice any thoughts and feelings you’re having in the moment.
- » **Label:** Tell yourself what the thoughts and feelings are about. (“I’m thinking about the time they bullied me. I’m feeling embarrassed.”)
- » **Decide:** Choose your action based on what will help you become stronger and grow. Choose actions that will help you connect with vitality or build value in your life.
- » **Viewpoint:** Remind yourself that you’re more than this event. Take a bigger view and see all of yourself. Your memories and experiences are only part of you; you’re more than this.

If you practice BOLD View when facing strong emotions, it can help you move on from the memory. You’ll learn to carry the memory and live a great life. You’ll need to practice BOLD View, but it will get easier.

Step 2. Practice Taking the View of a Friend

Think about what it feels like in your body to feel embarrassed or ashamed. Don’t be afraid of these feelings. You are bigger than them. Let yourself feel. What is embarrassment like? Do any of these words capture it?

Weird Ugly Picked on
Defective Worthless Stupid
Awkward Exposed Regretful

Now imagine you see a friend feeling like this. How might they look? What might they say? Now consider your role here. What would you say to your embarrassed friend? How would you help them? Write what you would say below.

Now let’s reverse it. Imagine someone who cares about you and wants the best for you—think of a friend or family member who you know wants the best for you. What would that person say to you about your embarrassing event? Write what they would say below.

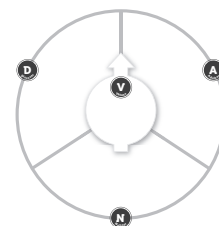
Next time you feel hurt or experience something embarrassing, practice taking the friend’s perspective. Speak to yourself like a friend. Try to extend yourself the same kindness that a friend would extend to you. (If this is hard because you’re unkind to yourself, perhaps you can just start with moving the cruelty dial toward kindness just a bit. Remind yourself, “Sometimes others treat me badly. It’s not my fault.”)

BE A GOOD FRIEND TO YOURSELF



Use Self-View to Increase Self-Compassion

This exercise will help you see your whole self in a bigger, healthier way. You'll see you're more than painful experiences. We will practice seeing all of you by completing the DNA-V disk again. See the disk here, or draw it, use the one in the back of the book, or download a copy of it from <http://dnnav.international>.



Advisor: In the advisor space, write some things you've used your advisor for by responding to the following prompts. It's okay to guess if you don't know the answer.

- » A nice thing you said to yourself when you were little
- » A nice thing you say to yourself now
- » A math problem you could solve when you were four years old
- » A math problem you can solve now
- » A mean thing you might say to yourself when you're fifty
- » A mean thing you say to yourself now

Noticer: In the noticer space, draw icons of things you can do with your noticer. It's okay to draw poorly or use stick figures—the idea is to use something other than words.

- » How you feel when you're tired
- » How you might feel when you're eighty years old
- » Five things you love to look at now
- » Five things you might love to look at when you're eighty
- » How you look when you're sad now
- » How you might look when you're twenty-five and feel sad

Discoverer: In the discoverer space, draw action stick figures. Just be playful. It isn't about doing it well; it's just about using something other than words.

- » A movement you love to do now
- » A movement you loved in third grade

- » A movement you might love when you're twenty-five
- » An action you did when you were in third grade and felt mad (such as yelling, hitting)
- » An action you do when you're mad at yourself now (such as throwing something)
- » An action you might do when you're twenty-five and mad at yourself

Value: In the center, write something you loved when you were four, something you loved when you were eight, something you love now, and something you might love when you're eighty.

Now, step back and look at the whole disk. Which parts of it are you? Notice you're all of these parts and that your DNA-V can change all the time. You're not your thoughts; they're part of you, and they change. You're not the bad feelings; they're part of you, and they change. Some parts seem to stay the same too, but you can always learn to do different things with them. For example, you react to sadness now differently than when you were four years old. Some values seem to stay, like loving others, but even the love we experience changes.

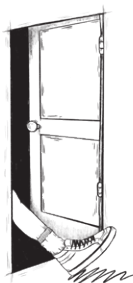
The point is, a person can grow and change. You're not the bad thing that happened. You're bigger than these things. Step back and take a larger view. You can learn how to use your DNA-V in ways that help you get the life you want.

YOUR LIFE YOUR WAY



» LET YOUR HEART GUIDE YOUR JOURNEY

If you've experienced hurt, fear, or felt unsafe in your life, remember, you're not to blame. You're not broken. You deserve fun and love, like all humans do. And you can learn to give love to others too. Keep having the courage to care about life and you'll journey beyond hurt.



» EMBRACE CHANGE

We block change when we don't let ourselves feel. If you try to block out hurt feelings, you'll likely get stuck in memories and struggle to move forward. Expect difficult experiences to make you feel stressed, on edge, and frightened. Remember that noticing fear and responding to it is a normal reaction and not a sign that there's something wrong with you. Let feelings come and go, and allow yourself to process the difficult experience.



» DEVELOP YOUR FLEXIBLE STRENGTH

For the next week, practice using all your DNA-V skills when you feel stuck in your memories or feelings of hurt:

- » **DNA-V:** Practice BOLD View. **B**reathe a few times, slowly. **O**bserve your body sensations and feelings. **L**abel what is going on (for example, "I am feeling stressed out about this"). Decide your action based on what is important to you. **V**iew yourself as being bigger than the bad event. Say, "I am not this bad event." You can grow beyond it.
- » **Self-view:** Practice seeing your life the way a compassionate friend would see it. Remind yourself that you deserve kindness.
- » **Social view:** Try not to shut everybody out of your life. If you're continually distressed, seek professional help; you don't have to do all the work by yourself. With some experiences, it's tough to deal all on your own. Research is clear about seeking professional help: It works. Tell your parents, school counselor, or teacher—someone you trust—when you need help. You can't always avoid the bad stuff life throws at you, but you can do things to help yourself recover and grow stronger.