

EXERCISES TO ACCOMPANY *THE JOYOUS RECOVERY*

The Joyous Recovery is a book to use and live by, not just to read. The following program of exercises guides you in putting the concepts into practice so that you can feel your life begin to improve in the ways you have craved.

The exercises are designed to be done with a co-counseling partner or in a small group. You can also work through them alone, however; wherever you see discussion questions, or see exercises that tell you to share on certain topics with co-counselor, address those in your journal instead. (Some of the exercises are already designed for writing in a journal.)

If you would like to find a co-counseling partner to work with as you go through these exercises, go to PeakLivingNetwork.org and look under “Finding a Partner.” Neither person needs to have previous co-counseling experience. It’s important, though, to watch at least Co-Counseling Lessons 1-3 (which you’ll find at YouTube.com/@PeakLivingNetwork) and to read the corresponding sections of *The Healing Partnership* (free at PeakLivingNetwork.org).

If you’re interested in working in a group, go to the “Groups” section of PeakLivingNetwork.org, where you’ll find a guide called “**Exercise Groups for *The Joyous Recovery***.” Even if you do work in a group, though, I recommend doing one-on-one co-counseling sessions regularly through the process.

At the end of each unit, read through the next unit quickly and decide with your co-counselor or group which exercises (if any) you’ll do individually before the next time you meet, or whether you’ll wait to do them all when you’re together.

There are two reasons why you might choose to work alone. One is if you can’t find a partner or group. The other is if you currently have severe difficulty trusting other people, or if you find it hard to discern which people are trustworthy and which are not. If you decide to proceed on your own, you may reach a point later where you feel ready to include other people.

Introduction to the Exercises

There are several important points about this exercise program before you dive in:

- 1) You need to have something to write on, such as a journal or notebook. If you can’t be confident that your privacy is secure where you live, you might consider writing on sheets of paper that you then destroy or writing electronically into a password-protected document.

2) Any time these exercises lead you to different issues than the ones we're guiding you toward -- including feelings or experiences that may be the *opposite* of what a particular exercise is asking you to explore -- *go with what comes up for you and follow where it leads*. Unexpected directions that your thoughts or feelings take will sometimes be the most productive path for your healing. (But don't skip positive topics; your healing will be slowed down if you hurry past the exercises that involve focusing on positive events, feelings, or memories. It isn't true that these are less important or less "deep" aspects of the work.)

3) Many issues that are addressed in one or two units may connect to months or even years of work that a person could productively do. These are just beginning explorations, but opening these questions up even briefly will have positive effects.

4) These units are designed to take between one and three weeks – you decide as you go along how much time you need on each one.

5) Write regularly in your journal during this process even if you're also working with a co-counselor or group. Journaling and co-counseling support healing in two different ways.

6) Consider joining the Peak Living Network Slack space, where you can communicate with other people in the network about a variety of issues in emotional healing. To receive registration information, send an email request to PeakLivingNetwork@juno.com.

7) If you're participating in a group, you can also draw upon the "Book Group Guide for *The Joyous Recovery*" available at PeakLivingNetwork.org. That guide gives a brief list of main points from each chapter.

8) Try to get turns of at least 30-minutes each in your co-counseling sessions for each unit.

9) You may decide that you want to repeat certain exercises or even to repeat the entire process of working through the book. Follow your intuition about what will best support your healing.

10) I recommend watching the videos "What is the Peak Living Network?" and "What is Co-Counseling" which you can find at <https://YouTube.com/@PeakLivingNetwork>.

This exercise program is a work in progress. I'll add new pieces over time and make changes based on suggestions I receive.

UNIT 1

Read the "Attention" section (in the front pages of the book)

Read Chapter 1

Read the page on PeakLivingNetwork.org called "How to Co-Counsel"

Watch the video "Co-Counseling Lesson 1" at <https://YouTube.com/@PeakLivingNetwork>

1) The main assignment for this first unit is to work on finding a partner, a group, or both to join you in reading the book and doing the exercises (unless you have decided it's better for you to work on your own).

2) Discussion/reflection questions:

a) What are some ways you have tried to pursue emotional healing in the past? How have those efforts gone?

b) What do you tend to most dump on yourself about? How might you argue back against those hurtful internal messages?

c) Share about a time when you felt like you made a difference to someone else's recovery from a hurt or a crisis..

UNIT 2

Read Chapter 2 to the end of the section "Locks on the Escape Exit"

Discussion/reflection questions:

a) Do you ever cry hard? Do you feel good afterward, or not?

b) Explore some happy memories of laughing with people.

c) What messages do you carry that say you shouldn't need other people? Where do you think those messages came from?

d) What do you know about what you were like as a baby? What do you know about how that time went for you?

UNIT 3

Read Chapter 2 (continuing) to the end of the section “Awareness Is Uncomfortable”

Discussion/reflection questions:

Violence

a) What kinds of violence (including "spanking") have you been the target of over the course of your childhood?

b) What violence has happened to you in your adult life?

c) What violence have you witnessed toward other people (as a child or an adult)?

Belittling

a) In what ways have you been given the message that something is wrong with you?

b) How were you dismissed or discounted as a child?

c) Speak aloud to your young self as if he or she were in the room, saying how important you think that child really was and telling him/her how their feelings and opinions should have been responded to. (This one is best done in a co-counseling session, but you could also do it alone. You could also do it in an exercise group if you felt enough trust and comfort there.)

Isolation

a) In what ways was isolation a challenge in your childhood?

b) What were some of your strategies as a child to deal with isolation?

Being Denied a Voice

a) Try to remember a time in your childhood when wrongs were being done to you or to people (or animals) you loved, and you were silenced from speaking out against it. What can you recall about what happened and how you felt?

Coping

a) What approaches do you remember using as a child to make pain go away?

b) Spend a few minutes taking pride in how important those techniques were to your survival (even if they also had some negative effects in the long term).

UNIT 4

Read the rest of Chapter 2

Discussion/reflection questions:

Triggers

- a) What difficult things come up for you when things go well?
- b) Have you ever been upset or downhearted after receiving good news? Were you baffled or self-critical about your reaction?
- c) Do any of the items listed in the section “Why It’s Hard When Things Go Well” apply to your childhood, or to your current circumstances)? Share some about that.

Frozen needs

- a) What are your thoughts when you learn the concept of "frozen needs"?
- b) How does this idea resonate with current (or past) challenges in your life?

Coping

Building on work you did last unit, reflect further about survival strategies you developed as a child to get through painful periods or to live with ongoing distress:

- a) Which of these patterns have continued into your adult life?
- b) Do you tend to criticize yourself for having these patterns?
- c) Share some about why these behaviors or patterns of thinking were once so crucial to you.
- d) With the above insights in mind, what could you start to forgive yourself for regarding current or past patterns of yours? What would be involved in starting to be kinder to yourself about these issues?

Mental health labels

- a) Have you ever been labeled as "mentally ill"? Who put that label on you?
- b) How were you affected by being labeled in this way?
- c) Do you carry remaining traces/scars from those experiences?
- d) How might you describe the difference between 1) being given a mental health label or viewed as mentally ill, and 2) taking seriously how our deep wounds have affected our functioning?

Balancing acts

- a) Look back over the list of balancing acts in the final section, called “Moving Forward.” Spend a few minutes sitting with this list and letting these three items sink into you.

- b) What thoughts do you have as you go over these? What feelings come up?
- c) Can you begin to envision the kind of peace that could come through finding these balance points? Share any thoughts you have about that.

UNIT 5

Read Chapter 3

Read Chapter 4 to the end of the section “Skill 4: Don’t Fix It”

Discussion/reflection questions:

The elements of emotional recovery

- a) How do the ideas from Chapter 3 connect to other things you've heard about healing?
- b) Which ideas are new?
- c) Which ideas do you doubt, or disagree with?
- d) Which ideas actually conflict with healing principles you've heard or believed before?
- e) Do the healing practices you’ve found helpful in the past fit under any of the categories covered in this chapter? If not, what additional categories do you think are needed?
- f) Do any of the ideas from this chapter help you to feel hopeful about healing? If so, why?
- g) How much healing do you believe is possible? What do you believe are the limits to how much a person can heal emotionally from severe past trauma and losses?

The rest of the exercises for this chapter are specific actions to work on during the coming week. Each action is followed by questions to explore as you go (with your co-counselor or in your journal.) If you’re in a group, you may decide to discuss these questions at your next group meeting, in which case look them over quickly together now.

Listening

- 1) Observe yourself during your interactions with other people for a few days. Start noticing who is talking and who is listening during each interaction. Look at both superficial conversations (strangers, acquaintances) and more significant ones (longer talks, whether with friends, co-workers, relatives, or your children).
 - a) How much of the time did you spend talking in each interaction, and how much listening?
 - b) Which person do you think did more of the talking? Did you notice any habits you have of doing more than your share of the talking, or more than your share of the listening?

2) Notice times during the week ahead when you're finding it hard to listen to someone -- we all have those times. When you sense that happening, examine the feelings or preoccupations you're having that are making it hard to listen.

- a) Are you experience cravings and longings that are distracting you?
- b) Are you feeling restless? Bored?
- c) Do you feel an overwhelming desire to be the one speaking and being listened to, which is making it hard to focus on what the other person is saying?
- d) Are you feeling reluctant to ask questions, either because you don't want to listen anymore or because you're afraid of prying?

Try not to criticize yourself about any of these observations. Just notice them, and then see if you can notice what the underlying feelings are for you.

3) During this week, notice if you're feeling the need to come up with "helpful comments" while other people are talking to you. Try for a few days to see if you can stop giving advice or trying to help the other person find solutions; just listen and express your caring and understanding about what the person says. Focus on helping them feel accompanied in what they're experiencing, not on trying to do anything about it.

- a) What does it feel like to do this?
- b) Are there situations where you find this especially hard to do?

4) Finally, during your conversations this week, see if you can slow down the exchange of roles (see the section called "Skill 1: Focus), meaning that you try to keep the focus on the other person for a longer period of time before you switch to speaking about yourself. Doing this generally requires asking lots of questions.

- a) Were you able to have some success in reducing the number of times the roles switched?
- b) What did it feel like to work on this?

UNIT 6

Read rest of Chapter 4

Discussion/reflection questions:

Receiving responses

- a) When you're the person speaking in any interaction, what kinds of comments from other people have the following effects on you:
make you feel that they're hearing you?

make you feel that they're not hearing you?

make you feel good?

make you feel bad?

b) What kinds of comments that may be well-intentioned nonetheless have a negative effect on you? (if you haven't already addressed this while answering the questions above)

Review the list under "Skill 5" called "Some Great Supportive Responses.

c) Which ones of these do you like hearing from people when you're talking? Which ones not?

d) For the ones that bother you or feel bad, explain why.

Listening that turns burdensome

a) Are their contexts in your life where you listen too much?

b) How often do you end up doing more than your share of the listening?

c) How might you work on listening *less*, while still also working on listening *better*?

d) What strategies might you try in order to have more opportunities to feel really heard yourself?

For the week ahead:

See how many questions you can ask people in each interaction you have. Work on listening carefully to their answers, then try to use what they just said to give you ideas for more things you can ask. Reflect with your co-counselor or exercise group, or in your journal, about what it was like to do this.

When it comes to asking questions, the best thing is to practice, practice, and practice; you'll get better and better at it.

UNIT 7

Read Chapter 5

1) Generate the lists below. You can do this in a journal, with your co-counselor, or in your Exercise Group if you're in one. This exercise will take some time, so you may want to combine some time working on these alone with group or co-counseling time.

a) List as many ways as you can think of in which you've been courageous over the course of your life. Review the section called "5. You've Been Brave" to help prompt your memory -- it includes many important brave actions that people don't tend to recognize.

b) List as many examples as you can remember of smart decisions that you've made at any point, and why they were smart. Remember that a decision can be smart and still lead to an unwanted outcome -- the result doesn't prove that the reasoning was bad. (And a good result doesn't always mean that we did the right thing, for that matter.)

c) List the ways you got through the hardest times in your life, building on exercises we've done in recent units of this program. Give substantial attention to this one.

d) Make lists of:

the people and animals you have loved

the places you have loved, especially outdoor spots

e) List the ways you've stood up for what's right. Don't rush past this question or decide, "I can't think of anything" -- you can.

f) List what you have given to others, or to the world. I don't mean gifts -- I mean contributions of love, presence, wisdom, assistance, and so forth -- although it's okay to list gifts too, as long as they really meant something to you when you gave them.

UNIT 8

Skim back through Chapter 5.

1) Share as much as you wish to from these lists with your co-counselor and/or Exercise Group. Feel anything that comes up for you as you share and don't hurry past those feelings.

2) Explore the list of different types of intelligence in the section called, "4. You've Been Smart."

a) Where do you find your strengths and interests on that list?

b) Do you have aspects to your intelligence that you've undervalued (or that other people have undervalued)?

c) What would it be like for you to put a higher value on them from now on?

d) Try saying several times aloud, "I'm really smart! Here's how!" As you do this, you might point to one or more of the items on the list. See what comes up when you do this.

e) When you were a child, where did you get your key messages about what it means to be smart, and about what types of intelligence are valuable?

f) In what ways may you have internalized limiting or hurtful messages about your intelligence? (This may include messages about the intelligence of people like you, not just about you specifically; e.g. other artists, other athletes, other women, etc.)

g) What might you be doing differently if you believed that you were a smart and capable person with important gifts?

UNIT 9

Read Chapter 6

1) Write the story of your life in about 1250-1750 words (this exercise is described in the section called “Begin Now”). There is a reason why I give this range: this is an exercise in zeroing in on what has really meant the most to you, both happy and painful. I’m not asking you to write a chronology of events. Instead, see if you can describe what the events in your life have *meant* to you, what their significance has been. You might address, for example:

- a) What would I most want a loved one to understand about what things have been like for me?
- b) What do I most need to say, including pieces that I haven’t yet expressed to anyone?
- c) What have I most cared about? What pieces of my caring (toward people, toward beliefs, toward animals or places) have I not yet allowed to fully show?
- d) What are my deepest satisfactions? What are my deepest longings? When has my heart most soared? When did it most break?

Write this piece under the assumption that you will *show it to no one*. If you decide later to share part or all of it that’s fine; but don’t hold anything back in this first version out of concern for how it might sound, or because it might hurt someone or make them angry. You can edit it later *if* you decide to share it.

2) Spend some time with your co-counselor discussing what feelings came up for you during this process. Share as much or as little as you want of the actual content of what you wrote; what matters more is to share what it was like to do it.

UNIT 10

Skim back through Chapter 6

1) Push beyond habitual interaction with at least one person this week. When someone asks how you are, for example, tell them how you really are that day. Or when you’re skirting around the edge of an issue with someone, take the dive into what you’re avoiding saying or exploring. (See the section called “Bringing Truth to Conversations” for more ideas.)

2) Words are only one way to express what our experience has been (as we did in Unit 9). Now choose a creative form from the following list: writing, drawing, singing, writing songs, dancing,

fixing up the inside of a house, acting, gardening, playing an instrument. Or, if none of these appeals to you, choose a different activity that feels creative to you.

Then sometime during this week do that activity for a half hour or more, with a focus on seeing how much *emotion* you can pour into it. The goal is to immerse yourself in the activity and forget about everything else as much as possible; just feel and enjoy your creativity and expression.

3) Share with your co-counselor about how it was to do the two exercises above.

(Writing a poem can be a surprising way to tap into creativity and emotion, so you might consider that option. Write it only for yourself, and don't try to make the lines rhyme unless want to. Try to ignore what a poem is supposed to be like or sound like; just write things down in a shape that looks something like a poem – then it's a poem! And your thoughts and feelings will come out differently than they normally do.)

UNIT 11

Read Chapter 7

1) Make the following assessment of your current support system:

- a) Whom do you feel close to in your current and recent life?
- b) Which people are the best ones to talk to or be around when things are hard for you?
- c) Which people accept help from you, including reaching out to you when they need support?
- d) Whom do you need to avoid when things are hard for you, because their responses make you feel bad?
- e) What do you need more of in your social connections? For example, do you need more people for fun? Physical affection? Deep sharing? Calling on at a bad time? Accepting help from you? Providing concrete help (e.g. when you suddenly need child care, need someone to drive you home after a medical procedure, etc.)?

2) a) Are there negative messages that are holding you back from reaching out to people you'd like to get to know? Or from people you already know and would like to get closer to?

- b) What are those messages, and where do you think they came from?
- c) What are some things you could say (to yourself or aloud) to argue back against what those messages are telling you?

3) During the next one or two weeks, choose three steps to take toward meeting new people (from the list called “1. Strategies For Meeting New People”).

Then explore the following questions with your co-counselor next time you meet:

- a) Where do you back off from getting close to people? What can you notice about what's going on inside you when you do that?
- b) Are there particular past experiences that seem to be triggered at those times? Could you share about those?

UNIT 12

Skim back through Chapter 7

1) Questions for reflection and discussion:

- a) What messages did you grow up with about asking for help?
- b) How have things gone for you when you've asked for help in the past?
- c) How do you feel when other people ask you for help? When do you feel happy to help, and when do you feel burdened by it?
- d) With respect to the people who are your main supports in life currently:
 - Who is supporting them?
 - What is difficult for them currently in their own lives?
 - How might you take more emotional care of them (while continuing to accept their support toward you)?
 - Do any other ways come to mind in which you could be nurturing your own support system?

2) During your next co-counseling session, try saying "Help me!" out loud several times. Say it with some intensity, and see what it brings up for you. You can try saying it directly to your counselor, and also try looking away and saying it as if there were someone else in the room you were speaking to. (You don't need to have anyone in mind while you do this, but if a particular person comes to mind -- for example, imagining that you're back in childhood saying this to one of your parents or to some other adult -- give that a try.) Notice any feelings that come up.

You could also try this exercise in your group if you have one, but be aware that it requires a considerable sense of present-time safety to be useful; so I don't recommend it unless you feel close and trusting with the members of your group

UNIT 13

Read Chapter 8 to the end of the section called “Laughter.”

Questions for reflection and discussion:

Crying

- a) What were your parents' beliefs about crying? How did they react when you or your siblings cried? Do you remember any reactions from other adults (such as relatives, teachers, coaches)?
- b) How did your siblings react when you cried?
- c) When was your last good cry? How did it affect you?
- d) What keeps you from crying more? (Perhaps crying doesn't help you feel better? You carry internal messages that you shouldn't cry more? It's hard to find time or safe places? The tears just don't come, even when you wish they would?)

Laughter

- e) What makes you laugh?
- f) Have you had experiences of laughing until you cry, or being there when that happened to someone else? How about experiences of crying until you end up laughing? If yes, tell about these.
- g) Can you remember any times when you felt bad about laughing because it was a serious occasion or serious issue? What do you think you were anxious about at those times? Do you remember whether the laughter seemed to relieve the anxiety?
- h) Can you think of times when laughing with other people helped you feel more connected to them? Tell about that.

UNIT 14

Read the rest of Chapter 8

Questions for discussion and reflection:

- a) Can you remember times when you've gotten frightened badly enough to end up trembling? What do you remember about these events?
- b) Did anyone notice you were trembling? Do you remember how they reacted?
- c) Did the fact that you were trembling frighten or worry you? Do you remember whether you tried to stop trembling and if so, how?

- d) When you read my claim that our bodies have a plan to keep us emotionally well, do you buy it? Or do you doubt it? Share your thoughts and reactions.
- e) When you think about this chapter as a whole – all about these forms of discharge and when they tend to launch into motion -- what pieces most resonate with you?
- f) Have you had an experience (or multiple ones) when deep discharge in any of these forms led you to feel really good? What could you share about that?

UNIT 15

Read Chapter 9

This chapter is an overview. The following two chapters will dive in deeper, and even greater detail is available in *The Healing Partnership: A Manual for Co-Counseling* (free at PeakLivingNetwork.org) and in Co-Counseling Lessons 1-16 on video (free at YouTube.com/@PeakLivingNetwork).

- 1) Skim through *The Healing Partnership* (free at PeakLivingNetwork.org) to get a quick feel for the range of information that's available in that manual.
- 2) Questions for reflection and discussion:
 - a) What are your reactions to the idea of finding and working with a co-counselor?
 - b) How does this feel different from the prospect of working with a professional therapist? Are there ways it might work better for you? Are there ways it might work less well?
 - c) What feelings come up about counseling someone else? Do you feel that you could learn to do it well? Or do you self-doubt arising about your capability to learn how?
 - d) What do you find exciting about the idea of entering into the co-counseling process? What aspects of it cause you to feel nervous or uncertain about doing it?
 - e) If you've already been working with a co-counselor:
 - What's working well for you in that partnership?
 - What could work better?
 - What could you explain or express to your co-counselor that could help him or her be more effective in supporting and counseling you?

UNIT 16

Read Chapter 10

Note: All of the exercises for Chapters 10 and 11 (Units 16 to 18) involve working with a co-counseling partner. If you don't have someone to work with (or don't wish to do so yet), skip ahead to Unit 19 which goes with Chapter 12.

1) Do a few short co-counseling sessions over the span of a week or so (at least 10-minute turns each), or do one full-length session (turns of at least 45 minutes each).

Before the first one, spend a few minutes with your co-counselor going over the structure and approach you've learned in this chapter of the book. Check in with each other about the following questions:

- a) Are there any aspects of the steps explained in Chapter 10 that you don't feel clear about?
 - b) Any parts that don't make sense to you, or that you actively disagree with?
 - c) Any part of the structure that feels too restrictive to you?
 - d) Anything from this structure that you're reluctant to try?
- 2) For the first ten or more times that you co-counsel with a partner, whether short or long turns, and whether on the phone or in person, check in with each other after *each* session about:
- a) Did we follow the structure? If not, in what ways did we not?
 - b) What's hard about following it?
 - c) How could we make the session go better next time?

I recommend strongly that you closely follow the structure I teach in this chapter for at least the first few months of co-counseling. The value of the structure becomes clearer over time, and the restrictions stop feeling like restrictions. (I've been following it for forty years and still see no reason to lay it aside.)

If you find it very hard to follow structures and guidelines in general, or if you feel triggered by them, those feelings are in themselves a valuable issue to explore during your turns. Structure and discipline can be oppressive – we've all had experiences of this – but they can also be liberating. The difference is whether we are accepting that structure by choice, and whether we see the sense behind it. Do your best to work through any feelings that come up about discipline, so that you have an easier time making the distinction between times when it's working for you and times when it's working against you. (You can do co-counseling sessions to work on your feelings about co-counseling!)

UNIT 17

Read Chapter 11 to the end of the section called “Love Your Partner”

During your co-counseling time this week keep the following list open where you and your partner can view it. When you’re in the listening role, see how many of the techniques you can use:

Counseling techniques to practice

- * *Validate* the speaker’s feelings and perspective
- * *Express interest* in the speaker’s life and experiences
- * *Appreciate* aloud the strengths and the goodness that you see in the speaker
- * Ask the speaker to spend a few minutes appreciating herself or himself aloud (*self-appreciation*)
- * Find two or three occasions to *take stands* in support of what the speaker is saying (such as “It isn’t okay for that person to treat you that way,” or “You deserved a lot better than that,” for example)
- * *Hold the speaker’s goodness* (which may not involve saying anything aloud, though it might; the key thing is to keep yourself centered in the person’s goodness during his or her turn)
- * *Hold the hope* (which, again, may not involve saying anything; the key thing is to keep yourself rooted in a belief that the speaker’s life is going to get better and better)
- * Find two or three occasions to *offer reassurance* (but remember, don’t overdo it; we need to give each other space to feel our feelings and not try to fix them)
- * If you’re co-counseling in person, offer thoughtful *physical touch and closeness*
- * *Ask questions* – lots!

All of these skills were described in detail in the chapter. The more you practice them the more they’ll come to feel natural to you.

UNIT 18

Read the rest of Chapter 11

1) In your next co-counseling session, spend a good chunk of time reviewing the following list and sharing your thoughts and feelings about the points:

Making your own sessions work better

- a) Do serious work in a substantial portion of your sessions.
 - b) Take risks in your sessions, open up.
 - c) Work cooperatively with your counselor, bearing in mind the concept, “During each person’s turn, the two of you think together about that person.”
 - d) Ask for what you need.
 - e) Take risks outside of sessions, take action, break out of patterns.
 - f) Strive to give up numbness, including reducing your use of substances.
 - g) Make your healing a priority (including how often you split time with someone).
 - h) Use phone time, build it regularly into your life.
 - i) Seek a fulfilling life rather than a comfortable one.
- 2) During the next several weeks, glance at this list when you have an upcoming session and choose one or two items to work into your turn that day. It might be something to practice (items 1-4) or to set goals about (items 5-9).
- 3) For the next month (or longer if you wish), put this list up somewhere visible (refrigerator, bulletin board, work desk, etc.)

UNIT 19

Read Chapter 12

- 1) Spend some time on PeakLivingNetwork.org, checking out each of the tabs and getting a good overview of the range of information that’s available there.
- 2) Questions for reflection and discussion:
- a) What do you think it would feel like to be as supported in your life as the people described in this chapter? What might you like or dislike about it?
 - b) How do you think this level of support might change how you live?
 - c) Are you interested in starting a PLN network where you live? What abilities and qualities do you feel you would bring to that undertaking?

UNIT 20

Read Chapter 13

Reclaiming Power

- a) What are some areas of your life that you have tended to feel powerless over?
- b) Are there areas where you might have more agency or choice than you've been assuming you do? What are your thoughts about that?
- c) Are there places in your current life where you feel that you're acting powerfully? If so, what makes you feel able to do so in those realms?
- d) What results are coming from your efforts to act from your power? (It's a common occurrence for these results to be mixed, so don't hesitate to share about that.)
- e) Are there areas in your life where you feel it's your obligation to put up with things that aren't right? Where does that feeling come from?
- f) What might you say back to those internal voices when they tell you that you need to "live with it"?
- g) When have you faced disapproval for standing up for yourself or for other people? Tell about that.
- h) What occasions can you remember where you've successfully stood up for yourself, or for people you cared about? Share about that, and see if you can connect with that sense of power.

Facing Retaliation

- a) Are you part of any group that gets retaliated against for standing up for itself? Say, for example, a woman, a person of color, or a worker? How has your awareness of that retaliation – and your direct experience of it – affected your life? (We'll explore these questions further in Chapters 18 and 19).

UNIT 21

Skim back through Chapter 13

Leadership

For the first two questions, try to think of people who have directly touched your life or been role models for you -- good or bad – as opposed to distant leaders such as politicians or heads of organizations. You might think of teachers, coaches, and group leaders, but also just people who tend to take leadership in social situations, such as on a hike.

- a) What leaders in your life have you admired? What specifically did you like about how they led?
- b) What leaders in your life have you most disliked? Why?
- c) What comes up when you consider viewing yourself as a leader? What messages have you internalized that say that you're "not the leader type"?

Living From Choice

- a) In what aspects of your life do you feel like you're "on automatic"? What does that feel like?
- b) Do you believe that you could get to a point where you could live from choice? Do you have internal messages that insist this will never happen, and if so, what are they saying?
- c) In what aspects of your life do you find yourself able to act decisively or to take charge of how you want things to be? Share about these, making an effort to speak with pride (even if some internal voices continue to minimize what you're accomplishing).
- d) What aspect of your life is your highest priority area for starting to exercise more choice?

UNIT 22

Read the article "Understanding and Maintaining Boundaries" at PeakLivingNetwork.org,

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- a) What messages did you get (verbal or nonverbal) regarding messages when you were growing up?
- b) What happened when you attempted to assert boundaries?
- c) Have you had experiences as an adult of being retaliated against for asserting a boundary?
- d) Are there areas of life now where you don't feel as in control of your boundaries as you would like to? What could be a next step – even a small one – toward regaining control in that area?
- e) What thoughts do you have about the concept that our rights to boundaries don't just apply to our bodies but also apply to our living and traveling spaces, our belongings, and even our minds?
- f) What would you like the world to understand better about boundaries, and about violations of boundaries? This could be about your own needs and experiences, or about your beliefs about human needs in general.

UNIT 23

Read Chapter 14 to the end of the section “Step 6: Feel and Release Your Feelings.”

Start making a goal chart, following the page-by-page instructions in this chapter. This may be a project you work on for several weeks, and you may decide to put it aside for periods of time and then return to it. For now just focus on making a substantial start, spending something like an hour on it.

The categories in the chapter are just suggestions. You may decide that some of the ones I’ve proposed don’t apply to you or don’t interest you, and you may decide to add other categories that are missing for you.

People have pointed out the absence of categories for “Finances and Money,” “Creativity,” and “Rest.” *These are important ones to add.*

This activity can benefit from a lot of room to write. You might use a large piece of butcher paper, or you might make a chart that is spread over multiple notebook pages.

The distinction between goals and resources is not clear to everyone. I was thinking of “resource” as meaning inputs that we need in order to give us the strength and the time to pursue the goals that matter to us. But collecting this resource can become a goal in itself, and the distinction is somewhat arbitrary. So I recommend not worrying much about this distinction; you can simply decide by personal preference whether you choose to think of a certain element as a resource toward pursuing other goals or think of it as a goal in itself.

UNIT 24

Read the rest of Chapter 14

1) Questions for reflection and discussion:

- a) How has your life been shaped by what other people wanted you to do or be?
- b) Are there things that would change now if you focused on what matters to you versus what other people want (or wanted) your goals to be?
- c) Can you create counter-arguments (to use inside yourself) against those externally imposed goals?

2) a) Do the check-in process (Step 7) to practice it. You may not have had the chance yet to take many steps toward a goal, but try the process anyhow so that you get a feel for how it works. Then decide how often you'll check in on your goal work. (Weekly? Monthly? Every few months?)

b) Life tends to interfere with goal work in various ways, whether due to a crisis such as a health concern or a job loss, or to gnawing challenges like discouragement or isolation. How might your goal plan include a plan for moving back and forth between i) concrete action steps toward goals and ii) time for emotional and physical healing work (such as co-counseling)?

3) Set a direction (based on the "Setting and Holding Directions section) and do your best to hold it for a week. At the end of the week, share how the effort went for you. Remember to stay away from self-blame if it didn't go very well; what matters is to make the attempt and then to process the feelings that came up.

UNIT 25

Read Chapter 15 to the end of the section "Interference With Emotional Release"

1) Questions for reflection and discussion:

a) What activities in life do you find most pleasurable? What activities or experiences do you find the most satisfying or fulfilling? Is there a distinction between these two for you, or do you have pretty much the same answers to both questions?

b) What messages did you get growing up -- from family, from religion, from community -- that pleasure is bad or sinful? How about messages you've gotten as an adult?

c) Are there behaviors in your life that you keep repeating even though they make you feel bad? Tell about that. What do you think drives you to keep doing this?

d) Do you have thoughts or feelings in reaction to the section called "The Underrecognized Role of Emptiness"? (You might also review the section called "Longing" that's about two-thirds of the way through Chapter 2, which is closely related.)

e) Has your life been affected by other people's addictions? Did addiction among adults, or among your siblings, color your childhood?

2) Tune into your pleasures for the next week, paying careful attention to your feelings. Which ones feel really good? Which ones make you hyper or numb, or leave you feeling dissatisfied later? Share about this at the end of the week.

UNIT 26

Read the rest of Chapter 15

1) You may not have major concerns about addiction in your current life. If that's the case, think of the "Overcoming Addiction" portion of this chapter as a guide to refer to if at any point you find yourself in the position of supporting someone else who is working to get free of addiction. That could happen with a friend, a relative, or a co-counselor of yours.

2) If, on the other hand, you believe that addiction is a major obstacle in your life, the work mapped out on these pages could become your focus for many months or for even longer than that. I recommend making a written plan for how you'll address all seven of the aspects covered in the "Overcoming Addiction" section, and share that plan with someone you trust, ideally a co-counselor.

UNIT 27

Read Chapter 16

Pick a tyrant you've had to deal with at any point in your life, whether it was your parent, boss, superior officer, relationship partner, or other individual or group. Go over each of these questions about that experience:

- a) What trapped you in that situation? What factors, both external and internal, made it so you could not leave or so that leaving was difficult and involved big sacrifices?
- b) How were you made to feel it was your own fault (by the tyrant, by responses you received from other people, or by societal messages you'd grown up with)?
- c) What impact did the tyranny have on your life and on your emotional state, in the short and long terms?
- d) Did the experience leave you feeling alone? Are there any lasting isolating effects? (For example, is the tyrant still present in your life?) What strategies have you tried to overcome the isolation?
- e) If the situation is over, how did it feel to escape it? Describe the process of recovering and healing from what happened.
- f) Do you feel that there's still healing remaining for you to do from that experience?

g) If the situation is not over, are there ways you could reach out for more help (such as the resources listed in the chapter)?

UNIT 28

Read Chapter 17

Questions for reflection and discussion:

Giving and Receiving Love and Affection

- a) Who are the people whom you have felt most loved by in your life? What was it about them, and about how they were toward you?
- b) Is there anything you wish to express to them (whether they are still living or not) about what their love meant to you and why it was so important?
- c) Choose one or two of those people and speak aloud to them, as if they were in the room, saying everything you would want to say to them, and allowing yourself to feel whatever comes up. (A co-counseling session is probably the best place to do this.)
- d) What people have you most enjoyed *giving love* to in your life? Did you get to see your love make a difference to them, and if so how?
- e) What is powerful and important about the love you have to give other people? How can you make a difference? (While you answer this question, do your best to ignore internal messages that are putting you down.)
- f) Which people are your current sources of physical touch? Is there anyone who gives you a nice, tight hug? Do you experience some loving contact each day?
- g) Can you think of any strategies you might try to increase the affection in your life?
- h) Is physical contact hard for you at this point in your life? Describe your feelings.

Self-Expression and Play

- i) Do you like putting your experiences into words? What other avenues of self-expression do you have (artwork, writing poems, dancing, athletics, gardening, etc.)?
- j) How do you let the world around you know who you are, what you believe, and what you feel?
- k) What messages have you internalized that say you shouldn't play? How might you bring more playfulness into your life?

UNIT 29

Skim back through Chapter 17

Questions for reflection and discussion:

Having a Voice

- l) In what realms of life do you feel like you have the most say over what happens? In what realms do you have the least say?
- m) Try saying aloud a few times, with force, "I have the right to full say over every aspect of my life!" Then discuss any feelings or memories that come up from doing that.

Beauty and Nature

- n) Describe your favorite places from childhood. What was precious to you about these places?
- o) What are your favorite places now, both near and far? How often do you get to be in them?
- p) Have any places that you loved been harmed or destroyed? What has that been like for you?

Connection

- q) What are your deepest and most cherished beliefs? What do you hold to be the highest truths?
- r) What do you most love with all your heart?
- s) What do you find most beautiful about life and about the world?
- t) What places or experiences make you feel the most at peace or the most at one with everything?

UNIT 30

Skim back through Chapter 17

- 1) Drawing upon all the categories in this chapter:
 - a) In what areas do you feel the best in your current life, with your needs being well met?
 - b) In what areas do you feel that the most is missing?
 - c) Which missing piece or pieces would you most like to start addressing first? Add one or more pieces to your goal plan (from Units 23 and 24) to make steps in that direction.

(This exercise is longer than it may appear.)

UNIT 31

Read Chapter 18

Questions for discussion and reflection:

Our Early Introductions to Oppression

- a) What is your reaction to the idea that children are an oppressed group? Share as much as you can about that.
- b) What would it feel like to be a small child and feel happy about being so small? What would it have been like to feel that you were just as valuable as everyone else?
- c) How would the world have needed to be different in order for you *not* to wish you were older?
- d) What other groups are you part of, or have you been part of in the past, that the dominant society views as second-class? What can you remember about the period in life when you first started to learn that you were part of this group, and about what that meant?
- e) Can you remember the early messages you got about groups you weren't part of? Explore your memories of that early societal training. (** Important Note: Don't talk about this stuff with people from the targeted groups present; it can rub salt in wounds for them. **)

UNIT 32

Skim back through Chapter 18

Questions for discussion and reflection:

Resisting Oppression

- f) In what ways have you resisted oppression? Try to remember the first time(s) you resisted.
- g) Can you remember times when you stuck up, or attempted to do so, on behalf of other oppressed people, whether from your own group or not? Do you remember whether you felt proud – or ashamed – of making those attempts?
- h) What prices have you paid for refusing to cooperate with oppressive treatment toward you or toward others?
- i) When have you had the opportunity to be an ally to an oppressed group that you aren't part of? How did that feel?

Internalized Oppression

- j) Does the concept of "internalized oppression" resonate with you? How so?
- k) Are there areas where you carry negative views of yourself for being part of certain groups?¹
- l) Do you carry negative views of other members of your own group(s)?

(You can find some strategies for healing and overcoming internalized oppression in *The Healing Partnership*.)

Other Thoughts

- m) Are there points from this chapter that you disagree with? Share your outlook on those issues.

UNIT 33

Read Chapter 19

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- a) What associations do you have with the terms "activist," "militant," "feminist," and "radical." What can you remember about where you first heard these terms? What images come to mind? What can you remember seeing on TV or videos, especially news shows, that shaped your view of what these terms mean and what kinds of people get these labels?
- b) Did you see any media images during your childhood -- or since -- where people who had these labels were portrayed as loving, concerned people? How do you think you may have been affected by how rare such portrayals are?
- c) This chapter states that many activists, including labor organizers, are fun and loving people with senses of humor. How does this clash with things you've heard or been taught?
- d) Have you internalized messages that say that you're immature for wanting the world to be different, or for believing a different world is possible? What do you remember about where those messages came from?
- e) If were to take a first step (or a next step) toward changing the world, what would it be? What, if anything, stops you from doing so? (In answering this question, refer to the box labeled "As modern citizens, our real say comes through:" and the bulleted list in the section "Finding the Best Role For Yourself.")

¹ "Self-rejection has powerful physiological dimensions that pertain to every aspect of well-being. From an early age it is one of racism's sharpest and most intimate harms." Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture*, pg. 312

- f) How might things change in your life if you viewed yourself as a leader?

UNIT 34

Read Chapter 20

1) Questions for reflection and discussion:

a) How do you feel when you hear me say that people are inherently good? Does that ring true for you, or not?

b) Where do your beliefs about people come from? What were you taught early in life about whether people are good or not?

c) When you read the bulleted points in the section called “Balance, Balance, Balance,” what thoughts and feelings come up?

2) Spend some time with your eyes closed, taking slow, relaxed breaths. See if you can let a feeling of balance come into you.

3) Make a list (written, aloud, or both) of reasons to be hopeful about your future.

4) Answer these final questions:

a) What is there about the totality of your life so far that proves you have capacity to heal from deep injuries? (You are, after all, still here.)

b) What examples from your life demonstrate that you eventually get out of dark places that you fall into?

c) What does the world need that you have to offer? (There’s a lot to say about this question, whether or not you feel the truth of that at the moment.)