

## **Exercises from The Neuroscience of Resilience and Renewal workshop with Linda Graham Esalen Institute, August 31-September 2, 2012**

These practical experiential exercises offer tools and techniques of “self-directed neuroplasticity” that will help you harness the capacities of your brain to rewire itself for greater resilience, lifelong. It will be useful to engage in these exercises with curiosity and openness, as “experiments” rather than following fixed rules and expecting a guaranteed outcome. As you reflect on the learning your brain is encoding from each exercise, you may notice an increasing joy and well-being from re-wiring your brain as you go along.

### Exercise #1: Sharing Kindness

Kindness is a positive, pro-social emotion. Giving, receiving, contemplating kindness helps shift the activity of the brain to a more “approach” stance toward all of experience.

*Kindness is more important than wisdom, and the recognition of that is the beginning of wisdom.*  
– Theodore Rubin

1. Gather in groups of four. Take one minute each to share a moment of kindness that has happened to you, today already, or earlier in the week, or earlier this year, even back in the third grade. Sharing a moment when someone held open the door, picked up something you had dropped, smiled as you walked down the hallway, sent a supportive e-mail when you were going through a hard time, something that registered in your consciousness as support from the universe, something that gave just a little lift or a little steadiness in that moment. And you’ll each take turns doing that for one minute.
2. Then, you’ll do another round of one minute each, exploring what it’s like for you, in this moment, to be sharing your story with other people, receiving kind attention, resonance, support, even non-verbally, maybe especially non-verbally, and listening to the stories of others as well.
3. Then each of you simply drops into silence for a moment to notice any effects in your body-mind from doing the exercise, a sense of buoyancy, or comfort, or relaxation.
4. You can do this exercise with variations – moments of courage, moments of flexibility, moments of patience –with great benefit to your brain and to your capacities for resilience. Each time you explore a quality necessary for resilience, you are intentionally conditioning that quality more deeply in your neural circuitry.

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### Exercise #2: Hand on the Heart

We come into the steady calm of our window of tolerance by steadily experiencing moments of feeling safe, loved, cherished, and letting those moments register in our body and encode new circuitry in our brain.

1. Begin by placing your hand on your heart, feeling the warmth of your own touch. Breathe gently and deeply into your heart center. Breathe into your heart center any sense of goodness, safety, trust, acceptance, ease, you can muster. Breathe a sense of calm and peace into your heart center. You may elaborate this as you wish. Breathing in a sense of contentment, well-being, a sense of kindness for yourself, gratitude for others. Slowly gently breathing in qualities of self care and self-love into your heart.
2. Once that's steady, call to mind a moment of being with someone who loves you unconditionally, someone you feel completely safe with. This may, of course, be a moment with a beloved partner or a beloved child or parent, though the dynamics of those relationships can sometimes be complicated and the emotions mixed. So you may choose a moment of being with any True Other to your True Self - a dear friend, a trusted teacher, a close colleague or neighbor - a moment when you felt seen and accepted, loved and cherished. It may be your therapist, your grandmother, a third grade teacher or a spiritual figure like Jesus or the Dalai Lama; it could be your Wiser Self. It could be a beloved pet. Pets are great for this, actually.
3. As you remember feeling safe and loved with this person or pet, see if you can sense in your body the positive feelings and sensations that come up with that memory. Really savor this feeling of warmth, safety, trust, and love in your body. Take a moment to allow the feeling to become steady in your body.
4. When that feeling is steady, let go of the image and simply bathe in the feeling itself for 30 seconds. Savor the rich nurturing of this feeling; let it really soak in.

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The very fast-track way to release oxytocin and calm down stress, even extreme stress, is through safe touch and warmth in a safe, soothing relationship. Any warm, loving touch can release oxytocin – hugs, snuggles, holding hands, partner dancing, cuddles with a pet, massage and body work.

### Exercise #3: Head Rub

One fun way to pro-actively generate oxytocin is a gentle two-minute head rub. You can massage your own head, of course, and you can easily practice this with a partner, friend or co-worker, sensual without being sexual. The gentle massage of fingers on the scalp, the forehead, the nose, the jaws, the ears, can lower your blood pressure and calm your racing thoughts. The touch, warmth, movement releases the oxytocin in your brain, calming your fear center, allowing a few moments respite from stress and pressure, and priming you to cope more resiliently with the next stressor.

### Exercise #4: Massaging the Vagus

There's a region at the back of the neck near the top of the spinal cord where the vagus nerve, loaded with oxytocin receptors, resides in the brainstem. You can easily locate that region by

placing your fingers at the back of your skull where the top of your neck nestles into the skull. A gentle massage to that part of the neck (you can easily do this yourself) can be a potent trigger for the self-activated release of oxytocin, increasing feelings of goodness and well-being throughout the day.

#### Exercise #5: Hugs

Stan Tatkin at UCLA has found that a 20-second full-body hug, when people feel safe enough with one another, is enough to release oxytocin in both men and women, to calm down a revved up nervous system, and generate feelings of safety and connection. Most of us don't feel comfortable with a full-body hug with anyone outside our partner, immediate family, or closest friends. We do the A-frame hug of arms around the shoulders at best. The full body-ness of the hug maximizes the warmth of the touching, so with whomever you do feel comfortable exchanging a full-body hug, do that as often as you can. Twenty seconds is about three long, deep breaths, easy for you and your hug-ee to time on your own, sometimes changing head positions with each breath.

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#### Exercise # 6: Body Scan

The body scan is a simple and reliable way to increase both our awareness and our compassionate acceptance of whatever we might be experiencing in our bodies at any given moment.

1. Lie comfortably on your bed or on the floor. Feel the back of your head, your shoulders, your back, your hips, the backs of your legs, your heels, touch the "ground." Let your body relax and sink into the ground supporting it.

2. Begin by bringing your awareness to your feet. Say "hello!" to the big toe of your right foot, listening for any aches or pains in your big toe; compassionately wishing your big toe a sense of comfort and ease. Say "hello!" to all the toes on your right foot, the arch, the ankle and heel, carefully noticing the sensations in each part of your right foot. Progress slowly through your entire body, right leg, left foot, left leg, etc. up through your torso, hands and arms, every part of your face and head. As you mindfully scan through, bring a compassionate caring and acceptance to any part of your body that needs comfort and ease. You can slow way down, mindfully notice, and send compassionate caring, to each knuckle if you have arthritis, or to scars from an old football injury. The body scan is a practice to mindfully, lovingly inhabit all parts of your body, to become safely present to every experience of your entire body.

3. Practice being especially mindful and compassionate toward sensations in the belly, in the heart center, in the throat and jaw, and in the genitals, areas where we can "hold" unconscious somatic memories of tension, shame, anger, or fear. Use your mindfulness and compassionate acceptance now to "hold" any sensations or memories in the safe container of presence and unconditional acceptance. Say "hello;" listen for aches and pain, physical or psychological, and send compassionate care and the intention for comfort and ease to any "troubled" memories held

in the body. The larger awareness and acceptance creates a safe container to work with any somatic memory that arises within it, and then de-condition or dissolve it.

4. Complete the scan throughout the entire body, saying “hello!” and wishing ease and comfort to each ear, each eye, your nose, all the tender parts of your mouth. To the hair outside of your scalp and to the phenomenal brain inside your scalp that is allowing you to be mindful and compassionate in this moment.

5. End this practice by becoming aware of the energy field of your body as a whole – your whole body breathing, your whole body in equanimity, alive, relaxed, and resilient.

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### Exercise #7: Relaxation Response

The relaxation response exercise takes advantage of the fact that our bodies cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time. The alternating tension and then releasing tension in the muscles of our bodies helps bring the entire autonomic nervous system back into the window of tolerance. Allow 7-10 minutes to move step by step through the body, either from foot to head or from head to foot. The exercise can be done sitting (great for a long bus or train commute) or lying down. Many folks eventually become so relaxed doing this exercise, they fall asleep before completing it. In time, you will strengthen your capacity to stay in the window of tolerance – deeply relaxed and fully alert.

1. Breathing gently and fully, begin by curling the toes of the right foot, holding that muscle tension for the count of seven. Slowly let the tensing go as you count to 15, breathing gently. Then curl the entire arch of the right foot as though pointing the foot, holding that muscle tension for the count of seven. Gradually let the tensing go as you count to 15. Then flex the foot, toes back toward the leg, holding that muscle tension for the count of seven. Slowly let the tensing go as you count to 15.

2. Continue tensing and relaxing various muscles of the body, progressing through your entire body as you tense and count to seven, then gently release as you count to 15. The counting focuses attention, allowing the worries and concerns of the day to fall away. Breathing into each area of the body as you let go of the tension helps that area relax.

3. Tense the lower right leg, let that go; tense the upper thigh of the right leg, let that go. Tense the hip and buttocks muscles of the right leg; let that go. Repeat for the left leg. Move through the torso of the body, tensing and relaxing parts of the chest and belly in turn. Tense the fingers of the right hand into a fist, then let them go, tense the forearm, the upper arm, the shoulder, then let go; repeat for the left hand and arm. Tense the muscles of the back, the neck, the facial muscles, and release.

End the session by blowing air through your fluttering lips - blowing a nice raspberry – yet another way to activate the PNS. (Who knew?) Savor the sensations of relaxation as you breathe gently. Rest one full minute – or longer - in this relaxed state.

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### Exercise #8: Breathing Creates Resonant Connection

Here's a very simple exercise to use the breath and touch to create the resonant connection between you and another person that can also relax your reactivity and help you return to your window of tolerance. This exercise is done with a partner. After 2-3 minutes you can switch roles.

1. Have your partner lie down comfortably on the floor and close their eyes. You sit comfortably on the floor near them. Come into a sense of presence, of being with this person, here, and now. Place one hand on their hand or forearm, the other hand on the crown of their head. Your partner breathes slowly, deeply. Begin to synchronize your breathing with their breathing. Simply breathe together for 2-3 minutes, noticing the life force of the breath entering and leaving their body, entering and leaving your body. You are strengthening the capacities of your resonance circuit to regulate you, and dropping into a mutual baseline equilibrium, an equanimity for two.

2. A variation of this exercise is to contemplate the reality that the molecules of air entering and leaving your lungs are the same molecules of air entering and leaving your partner's lungs, and indeed, are the same molecules of air entering and leaving the lungs of anyone you are in the same room with, the same car or bus or plane with, the same office or store or theater or world with. To open up to this kind of intimacy with beings all over the planet can radically expand our minds and open our hearts, creating a larger perspective, the bigger picture, that is also supportive to seeing clearly and relaxing your body into the window of tolerance.

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### Exercise #9: Moving the Body to Re-Wire Difficult Emotions

Here's a simple experiential exercise I learned from psychologist Natalie Rogers to mindfully, compassionately use alternating positions in the body to re-wire (re-condition) difficult emotional and mental states.

1. Identify an afflictive state that you would like to explore, process, and shift. It could be a distressing emotion like fear, anger, sadness; it could be a distressing mental state like confusion or agitation. Choose one that feels real to you, and that you would like to shift. Come into awareness of body sensations, images, feelings, thoughts of this state.

2. Now, allow your body to lead you and come into a body posture that embodies this state. Stay in this posture for 30 seconds. Don't do a lot of thinking or figuring out here. Just let your body express what you are feeling, or the state of thinking you are working on. Come into this posture, and stay in this posture for 30 seconds.

As an example, allow your body to assume the posture of collapse: perhaps bending over, curling shoulders inward, perhaps hiding your face in your hands. Feel your way into your body's experience of this posture.

3. Now, without thinking, without going to your head at all or putting anything into words, allow your body to move into a posture that is the opposite of this state. Let your body lead you, and move into an opposite posture. Remain comfortably in this posture for 30 seconds.

As an example, allow your body to assume the posture opposite to collapse. Perhaps standing tall, spine straight, arms outstretched in exuberance. Feel your way into your body's experience in this posture.

4. Now, without thinking, return to the first posture, and hold it again for 15 seconds. Then, resume the second posture again and hold it for 15 seconds.

5. Now allow your body to find its way into a posture that is in the middle of those two. The middle posture may incorporate elements of the first two postures; it may feel entirely new.

6. Now take a moment to notice the sensations and feelings in this posture. What are you experiencing? Notice any differences between the postures, between the two states they embodied. Reflect on your experience. What shifted? What state are you in now?

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#### Exercise #10: New Conditioning: Creating a Better Choice

New conditioning creates new neural pathways in your brain. We know that new experiences, and repeating those new experiences, cause neurons in your brain to fire in ways that create those new neural pathways. To re-wire your brains for resilience, you pro-actively seek the new experiences that you know will encode new, more adaptive coping strategies into your brain's circuitry, and repeat them.

1. Identify a habitual negative reaction within you –impatience, boredom, startle, temper, rejection – that you would like to use as a cue to practice re-wiring your brain.
2. Identify the new response you would like to substitute to help you move toward the 5 C's of coping – allowing, exploring something new, calming down, pausing to reflect, seeing the good.
3. Identify the positive code words or phrase you will use to “break the circuit” and cue yourself to change the channel in your brain – “allow,” “explore,” “it's OK,” “pause,” “what's the good here?” You'll choose your own code words to condition a new habit; what's important is to catch the trigger and block the reactivity before you fall all the way down the rabbit hole. You may choose a word that already brings to mind a state of resilience or well-being if you have one: “love,” or “learn” or “breathe” or “slow down” or “open.” Practice saying your cue word to yourself while you're in that actual state so that your brain conditions itself to move to that state when it registers the cue. Notice how you feel in your body and mind in that state
4. Each time the trigger arises, practice the new pattern of response: trigger (criticism) – cue to break the circuit (be kind!) – and shift to the state you've chosen as the new experience (a genuine kindness) as many times as you need to for the new pattern to become the new habit.

5. Notice as the old pattern fades away into the background and the new pattern becomes more automatic. You have conditioned new learning in your brain, and you have learned that you can. Take in the sense of success and mastery as you experience the actual re-wiring in your brain.

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#### Exercise #11: De-Conditioning: Dropping into a Mental Play Space

De-conditioning creates the receptivity and flexibility in your neural circuitry that re-opens your brain to learning and change. De-conditioning uses the awareness and acceptance that comes from a compassionate mindfulness practice to shift the processing of your brain to the diffuse, “soft” focus of the lateral network. The lateral network generates a neural flexibility, a neural receptivity in the brain that allows you to create a new mental “play space” in your brain, making it far easier to wire in the new strategies as you choose to.

1. Sit or lie down comfortably. Breathe gently into your belly, slowly in and out. Breathe a sense of goodness into your belly. Breathe in a sense of safety and well-being.
2. As you are ready, gently bring into your awareness the people or things in your life you are grateful for. Take your time to savor the gratefulness throughout your body. Remember moments of kindness in your life, when people have been kind to you, and when you have been kind to others. Savor the feeling of kindness throughout your body. Remember a moment of feeling loved and cherished by someone, then remember a moment of you loving and cherishing someone, even a beloved pet. Savor the feeling of love throughout your body.
3. Let yourself claim the goodness of your own self now. Notice any ease and relaxation as you drop into this state; know that this is the state of spacious awareness and acceptance that states of kindness, compassion, good will come from. Trust that from here it becomes possible to change the channel and become kind. Using mindfulness practice to shift to the lateral network of the brain helps your brain de-focus and relax the gripping. The neural circuitry is opening up a receptivity to new learning, new options, new possibilities. The larger awareness can also help you “let go” of your previous conditioning and trust in new learning, new options, new possibilities.

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#### Exercise #12: Re-Conditioning: Out with the Old, In with the New

Re-conditioning helps you pro-actively re-wire the neural circuitry of an existing strategy by “repairing” that strategy with a new more effective one. When the strategies are paired in your conscious awareness, the simultaneous firing of neurons encoding both strategies allows them to de-consolidate (fall apart), then re-consolidate (re-wire) *together* a fraction of a second later. The neural firing pattern of the new strategy can “trump” the old, re-wiring it completely, often immediately, often permanently.

1. I am giving these directions for re-conditioning by following the example of re-conditioning criticism with kindness. You can use the exercise to follow that example if you wish. You can choose to re-condition the pattern you worked with in the new conditioning exercise; you can choose to work with something completely different.
2. Settle yourself in an awareness of our own mindfulness and your own compassion for yourself as you begin. Consolidate the resource of a very positive memory first, to create a sort of “neural sandwich” with the negative or traumatizing memory sandwiched between the initial positive experience you use as a resource and the second positive experience you are using to directly contradict or disconfirm the negative experience you are re-wiring.
3. Remember a moment when you felt a genuine kindness in your heart. It could be for the person you will be working with in this exercise; it could be for anyone else. It’s the feeling of kindness and goodness in you that you’re focusing on. Evoke the memory of that moment in as much detail as you can – when and where you experienced this moment of feeling kind, what you were doing or saying, what the other person in this memory was doing or saying. Notice if you can feel in your body now the feelings you experienced in your body then. You’re “lighting up” the network of this stabilizing memory as completely as you can.
4. Let the initial memory of kindness fade into the background a bit. Now evoke the memory of a moment when you felt critical of the person you want to work with in this exercise. Evoke the memory of that moment in as much detail as you can: when and where you experienced this moment of feeling critical, what you did or said, what the other person did or said. Notice if you can feel in your body now the feelings you experienced in your body then. You’re “lighting up” the network of this negative memory as completely as you can, safe in the container of mindful empathy.
5. Now imagine feeling kindness in your heart specifically toward the person you want to work with in this exercise. This experience of kindness can be a memory; it can be a new moment you create in your imagination. “Light up” this positive moment of kindness in as much detail as you can, imagining what you’re saying or doing as long as it directly contradicts or disconfirms the negative memory. Let the new experience of kindness become strong and steady in your awareness, feeling the feelings of kindness in our heart, in your body.
6. Hold the negative memory and the new positive experience together in your awareness – simultaneously if possible (*it is possible, with practice.*) Toggle back and forth between the two if necessary to get started. Refresh the new positive experience as needed to keep it steady and strong.
7. Eventually let go of the negative memory and focus your awareness only on the positive experience of kindness. Notice any shifts in sensations or feelings in your body; notice any shifts in your thoughts about yourself or the person you are practicing kindness with.

8. Recall the memory of the critical moment again; notice any decrease in the intensity or charge of this memory. Let it go again and return your awareness to the memory of the experience of kindness.

9. Repeat this process as many times as needed; eventually the critical response will no longer be triggered at all, or will simply feel like “no big deal.”

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### Exercise #13: Mindfulness of the Breath

Mindfulness – as the steady, non-judgmental awareness and acceptance of experience that you learn in this chapter – leads to the clarity of self-awareness and shifts in our perspectives that allow us to see clearly what’s happening, respond to triggers and traumas with far more open-mindedness, and tolerate choosing what needs to change with far more flexibility than before.

The practice of mindfulness – pro-actively training our brains to focus attention and strengthen our conscious awareness – allows us to see our conditioned patterns of response clearly so that we can get unstuck from them when we need to. Mindfulness trains our brain to become astutely aware of our actual experience in the moment. We become aware of our responses to our experiences in the moment, even aware of enduring patterns of response, resilient or not, and aware of entire styles and strategies of coping and whether they really work or not.

As we mindfully focus our attention on our breathing, we actually strengthen the structures in our brain that help us become more present, engaged, and confident in our lives.

1. Find a time and place where you can sit or lie down quietly, undisturbed. Find a posture for your body that feels comfortable, relaxed yet alert. Allow your eyes to gently close or rest open in a soft gaze. If mindfulness practice is new to you, you can begin to experience what it means to focus your attention by first being aware of the wall in front of you, then on the wall behind you, then on the walls on either side of you. Then focus your attention on your throat, then on your breath. This is simply to demonstrate to yourself that you can direct your attention.

2. Bring your awareness to your breath flowing gently in and out of your body, gradually noticing changes in the rhythm, the intensity, the sound of your breathing. Notice your belly rising and falling with each breath. You may even feel your breath moving throughout your entire body, your whole body breathing.

3. As you focus your attention on your breathing, allow yourself to notice that you are aware not only of the breath itself - the object or noun or thing of your awareness - and the breathing itself - the process or verb or the unfolding of experience moment-to-moment that you are observing - but that you can also be aware of the fact that you are focusing your attention; you can be aware of the steadiness of the awareness itself. You are aware of the experience of the moment but not embedded in it as it changes.

4. You may notice that your attention occasionally wanders as you focus on your breathing. No problem. Noticing the wandering is “waking up” to awareness again. Bring your attention back to your breathing. Practice noticing your breath until you can remain focused on the breath for one full minute. You are training your attention to remain steady.

Even one minute of practice begins to change your brain.

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#### Exercise #14: Noticing and Naming

Noticing and naming our experience keeps the pre-frontal cortex of our higher brain “online,” making it far easier to pause and reflect, see clearly and choose wisely, no matter what is going on.

1. Imagine you’re walking down the sidewalk in the neighborhood where you live. You notice a friend walking toward you on the sidewalk on the other side of the somewhat busy street. You call out and wave “hello!” but there’s no response. Notice your own split-second reaction to that “no response” in your own body, a contraction, a drop in energy. Notice whatever thoughts might begin to cascade in response to your body’s reaction. “Hmm, that’s unusual. I’d better try again.” Or “Whew! He has a lot on his mind. I wonder if I should even bother him?” Notice any reactivity to those thoughts. “Gee, he seems a little stuck up today.” Or “Oh, no! What have I done wrong?” Notice if your thoughts follow a pattern that you have noticed before. Feeling badly about yourself or wanting to reach out even more, for example.

2. Now imagine that your friend sees you and, on his own, calls out and waves “hello!” to you. Again, notice your own split-second reaction in your body to him connecting with you now, a smile, an uplift of energy. Bring awareness to any shifts in your body, notice any shifts in your thoughts. “He noticed me!” “I’m glad we weren’t disconnected after all.” As you reflect on your experience, notice if your thoughts follow a pattern that you have also noticed before, perhaps relief or gratitude.

3. Take a moment to name the reactions and the patterns you discovered, with compassion for any reactions that may have been triggered by the noticing. With every moment of practice in noticing and naming, you are strengthening the CEO of resilience. And by pausing to do this, you are conditioning your brain to create choice points, giving yourself the chance to respond with more flexibility and choose a different response the next time.

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#### Exercise #15: Replacing ANTS with APTS

One of the hallmarks of resilience is to be able to shift gears and re-calibrate our responses quickly when necessary. Once we notice the automatic patterns that are filtering our reactions and thus shaping our responses, we can choose to immediately shift those perspectives in ways that will re-wire them.

Modern neuroscience validates the power of positive thoughts, or even different thoughts, to interrupt the automaticity of negative thoughts. Re-directing our attention to something positive allows our brains to activate different circuits and shift our view. The practice of re-focusing our attention, shifting our view, and eventually re-framing our experience, over and over, strengthens the brain's capacity for response flexibility and thus our resilience.

1. Identify one habitual negative thought you would like to replace. You're sick of it like I was when I stepped ankle deep in wet cement and almost fell down the rabbit hole of calling myself clumsy.
2. Then brainstorm several different alternative thoughts to counter your negative thought. The alternative may be a directly opposite thought, i.e., "I'm lazy" becomes "I'm motivated when I'm interested." The alternative may lead you to a different realm of thought entirely: "I'm lazy" becomes "I'm so looking forward to Greg and Diane coming over Saturday; I wonder what I'll cook?" The alternative maybe simply be to think of someone who loves you and take refuge in feeling that love for the moment, or remembering a moment of "Sure, I can!" and being resourced by that memory.
3. When you notice the habitual negative thought arising, practice using your alternative thought immediately. The point of ANTs to APTs is not to never react again with "I'm lazy." It's to interrupt the cascade of self-deprecation that immediately and reflexively follows that thought. The idea is to send the brain in another direction, which gives our mind a few moments to recalibrate itself and open up the field of thinking-feeling again. Cultivating an immediate positive response to a negative thought creates the space to shift our perspective, supporting more flexibility and resilience. And, every time we do it, we are conditioning our brain in a more resilient direction.

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### Exercise #16: Belly Botany

Modern neuroscience is revealing that one of the best ways we can keep our brains open to new learning, new ways of seeing things is, in fact, by seeking new landscapes.

1. Take five minutes to try belly botany yourself. (Honestly, most folks who try belly botany get engrossed in the critters and the colors and the shapes for far more than five minutes.) Find a one-square-foot patch on a favorite beach, in a meadow, in a forest, in your own back yard, in a flowerbox, or in a city park. Lay comfortably on your stomach so that your eyes can focus on your patch from a height of approximately six inches. Come into a sense of presence in this moment, in this place. De-focus on any sense of self in this moment; concentrate your attention on your patch and notice any activity, any stillness, any change of the light and shadows, the relationships of things one to another; notice harmonies of colors and shape; notice oddities.
2. When you have focused your attention on your belly botany patch for five minutes (or more) move your body to a standing position and focus your attention on the larger landscape around you. Notice the sudden change in scale, the relative vastness of the larger landscape. Maintain

the de-focusing on your sense of self in this larger view for a few minutes, noticing the shapes and colors, harmonies and oddities in the larger landscape around you.

3. Then bring your attention back to yourself, and notice any changes in your view of yourself. See if you don't immediately gain a new perspective on the place of your life in the small and the vast. With practice, you can access this tool of shift any time you need to gain a fresh, big picture perspective on things. The de-conditioning – de-focusing - on yourself encourage a de-focusing in the circuitry in your brain that allows new views and new perspective to link together in new ways.

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### Exercise #17: Cultivating the Wiser Self

In both Western psychology and Buddhist philosophy, practices of self-awareness, self-reflection, self-compassion, and self-acceptance lead to that subjective sense of well-being that I've referred to as our true nature or wiser self. It is the mature functioning of the pre-frontal cortex that allows us to recognize this sense of true nature or wiser self, and use it to guide our responses to life's stressors on a regular basis.

1. Find a comfortable position to sit quietly. Allow your eyes to gently close. Breathe deeply a few times into your belly and allow your awareness to come more deeply into your body. Allow yourself to breathe comfortably. Become aware of relaxing into a gentle field of well-being.
2. When you are ready, imagine you are standing on your favorite beach near the water's edge. Imagine the details of the scene and your presence there in vivid detail. When you are ready, imagine yourself rising up into the air, floating up above the beach, traveling across the water, traveling however far you need to travel to land on another beach in another land. This is the home of your wiser self - the imaginary figure of either gender that embodies the deepest aspirations and highest fulfillment of yourself. An older wiser "you" that has, in fact, succeeded in manifesting all of your dreams and aspirations - a well-spring of resilience, equanimity, and well-being.
3. Imagine yourself walking toward the dwelling of your wiser self, whatever home or cabin or garden seems fitting. Walk up to the door of this dwelling; notice how your wiser self greets you. Does she come out to meet you? Does she invite you in? Does she shake hands or bow or hug you? Notice how old your wiser self is, how she is dressed, how she moves as you walk with her.
4. Imagine yourself sitting and talking with your wiser self. Notice her presence, her energy and how it affects you. Imagine you can ask your wiser self how she came to be who she is; listen carefully to her answer. Ask what helped her most along the way. What did she have to let go of to become who she is? Can she share with you examples of when and how she triumphed over adversity? You may choose to ask your wiser self about a particular problem or challenge facing you now. Notice what wise advice your wiser self offers that you can take with you. Listen fully to all she has to tell you.

5. Experiment with what it would be like to embody your wiser self. Invite your wiser self to stand and become part of you. Notice how it feels to inhabit your wiser self from the inside out as you experience your wiser self within you. When you are ready, imagine your wiser self becoming separate from you again.

6. Your wiser self will offer you a gift - an object, a symbol, a word or phrase - to remind you of your wiser self. In your imagination, receive this object into your hand and place it somewhere in your clothing for safekeeping. Your wiser self will let you know their name; listen carefully to this name and remember it well.

7. As you prepare to leave, take a few gentle breaths to anchor this connection you have with your wiser self, knowing you can drop into this experience of your wiser self anytime you choose. When you are ready, imagine how you thank your wiser self for the time you have spent together; imagine how you say good-bye. Walk back to the place where you landed, then imagine yourself again rising up into the air, floating back across the water to come down again on the beach where you started. When you have settled yourself back on the beach where you started in your imagination, gradually become aware of your surroundings and, when you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

8. You may wish to write down your experience with your wiser self to help integrate it into your conscious memory, and to use it later for reference any time you need guidance from within about how to be more resilient. As with any use of imagination to access our deep intuitive knowing, the more you practice experiencing your wiser self, the more reliably you will be able to embody and act from your wiser self as you respond to the challenges and difficulties of your life. Imaginative exercises such as this one actually change the neural circuitry of our brains, creating new, positive habits of mind that become genuine resources in coping with anything, anything at all.

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#### Exercise #18: Wished For Outcome for Resilience

Re-conditioning doesn't change what happened before, but it changes our relationship to what happened before. Re-conditioning doesn't re-write history, but it does re-wire the brain. You can practice this technique with memories that are not emotionally fraught. Eventually you can use this protocol to resolve memories that truly were traumatizing.

1. Sit comfortably in your chair or lie comfortably on the floor or bed. Focus your attention on your breathing, breathing calmly and deeply into your heart center. Call to mind a particular moment of ease and well-being. Or a particular sense of your own goodness. Or a particular moment when you felt safe, loved, connected, cherished. Or specific people who love you, who believe in you. Remember one of these moments in as much detail as you can, in as many levels of your body-brain as you can – a visual image, the feelings that the memory evokes, where you feel those feelings in your body, any thoughts you have about yourself now as you remember the

sweetness of that moment then. Let yourself savor this moment in a mindful and compassionate “holding” of the memory.

2. When you feel bathed in the good feeling and are still anchored in the larger awareness of safety in the present moment, call to mind a moment of experience when things went awry, a moment when you felt overwhelmed and weren’t coping very well, however slight or terrible, a hiccup or a hurricane. (But chunk down the terrible to one little bit of it. Start with a small storm and work up to the hurricane.) As you go back into the memory of that moment, imagining what was happening quite vividly, remain in your observer role rather than getting sucked into the experience again. Evoke this memory to light up all the neural networks – visual images, body sensations, emotions, thoughts or beliefs at the time. Memories of what you said and did, what someone else said or did; who else was there; how old you were and how old they were; what you were wearing and what they were wearing, Maybe you wish you could have said or done something differently at the time, but didn’t. Maybe you wish someone else had done something differently at the time, even if that could never have happened in real life. Remember the moment, the feelings of the moment, in as much detail as you can.

3. Then, in your imagination, begin to visualize a wished for outcome. What you wish could have happened differently. What you would have said or done differently. What the other person could have done differently, even if this never could have happened in real life. What someone else not even in the original scenario could have said or done. Perhaps you even wish none of this had happened at all. You can imagine what would have happened if this event hadn’t happened. Imagine the new scenario in as much detail as you can. Let the new story unfold as you would have wished. You are creating a scenario that completely disconfirms or contradicts what happened before.

4. Hold the two scenarios in your awareness at the same time. (Or toggle back and forth between them, always refreshing and strengthening the newer, more positive scenario.) After a few moments, “let go” of the old memory and just rest your attention in the new scenario. Let your mind play out this new scenario, and then notice how you feel. Notice any emotions or thoughts or beliefs about yourself that come up now, and if they are more positive, resilient, let them soak in. Then bring your awareness back to the present moment.

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#### Exercise #19: Dropping into the Un-Conditioned; Dissolving the Self into the Sacred

When we feel stable and secure enough in the flow of ourselves, we can safely relax the mind’s grip on our self and shift into a mode of consciousness where the sense of self-ing temporarily “dissolves.” People do this fairly regularly in day dreams or in a reverie where our awareness can just “float.” This state of reverie creates the conditions in the brain where, rather than occupying the brain’s processing with analysis and problem solving, the brain is “free” to meander and wander, to be free to find new associations, new linkages between one idea and another, or one memory and another, to “connect the dots” in a new way. This state of reverie creates the conditions for new insights – an “aha!” to pop up into consciousness “out of the blue.”

By focusing our awareness on Awareness, we are giving the brain something to do as we gently encourage it to do less and less. As awareness approaches non-doing, only being, the mind can come to rest in unconditioned awareness, only awareness happening. Focusing our attention on breathing in this exercise gives the brain an anchor in real time reality, even as everything else “disappears.” The brain seems quiet because “thing-ness” has fallen away. There is only being, and our awareness of being.

1. Sit comfortably. Allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your awareness on your breathing, gently in and out. As you follow your breathing, notice your own awareness of your breathing. Awareness allowing you to know that you are breathing.
2. When that awareness of your breathing is steady, begin to notice the breathing of any people around you, or that you can imagine around you. No need to do anything; just noticing or imagining other people breathing as you are breathing, and noticing your awareness of that. Notice what you are aware of in your own simply being as you rest in this awareness of Awareness.
3. Staying anchored in an awareness of your own breathing, expand your awareness to include more people you know, who are not necessarily around you in this moment, yet you can know they are breathing in this moment, too. Notice your awareness of your awareness of everyone breathing. Notice your awareness of your own simply being as you remain aware.
4. Still anchored in an awareness of your own breathing, expand your awareness further to include people you don't know, outside the building you are in, perhaps elsewhere in the neighborhood, throughout the city, across the region. Become aware of all of them breathing, breathing together. Notice your awareness of your awareness, you are simply being, being aware.
5. Anchoring in awareness of your own breathing as you proceed through the rest of the exercise, continue to expand your awareness to include people all over the country, all over the planet, all breathing. Expand your awareness to include all living creatures breathing, breathing in the parks, the forests, underground, in the lakes and rivers, in the oceans, the sky. All sentient beings breathing, breathing together. And notice your awareness of your awareness of existence, and your awareness of simply being.
6. Expand your awareness to include all forms of existence, some breathing, some not. And notice your awareness of your awareness of the breathing, and your awareness of simply being.
7. Expand your awareness even further, beyond our planet to other planets, other stars, other galaxies, and the space between the planets and stars and galaxies. Expand your awareness out as far as you can possibly imagine; and notice your awareness of your awareness expanding. Rest comfortably, safely, in this vast spacious awareness, in this vast simply being, for as long as you choose. Take your time.

6. This is the spaciousness where new insights, new aha's, can occur spontaneously, out of the blue. Or they may not. But we are creating the conditions for revelation in this vast open awareness of the un-conditioned.

7. As you are ready, gently bring your awareness back to your awareness of sitting in the room you are sitting in, in this moment, breathing. Focus your awareness on simply breathing. Take a moment to shift gears, and reflect more fully on your experience of simply being. You may experience a lightness, a spaciousness, an openness in your being.

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### Exercise #20: Deep Listening

*The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.*

*-Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.*

*We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us there is something valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit.*

*- e.e. cummings*

1. This exercise is done with a partner. Decide who will be speaker first all the way through and who will be the listener first all the way through. When you have each answered the repeating question fully, you can switch roles so you each get the benefit of practicing listening and being listened to.

2. The listener will ask the speaker a question (samples below); the speaker will answer as honestly, as thoughtfully, as she can. The listener listens silently, though attentively and appreciatively. The listener then simply says "I appreciate you letting me know that." And asks the same question again. The speaker drops a little deeper into herself and answers the question again from a different angle or from a deeper level of understanding and inner truth. The listener listens as before, and when the speaker is finished, again says. "I appreciate you letting me know that," and then repeats the question again. If the speaker doesn't speak right away, the listener simply holds a receptive silence during the speaker's reflection and self-inquiry. The speaker answers the repeating question for as many rounds as they are still discovering new understandings or feelings about the question.

3. Sample questions. What brings you joy in your life? What has brought you sorrow? What worries you now? When have you found courage in dark times? What are you grateful for? What are you proud of? (Choose only one and then repeat it.)

4. When the speaker is done (and thanks the listener for listening), the two of you switch roles. When you have both completed the rounds of listening and being listened to, you can de-brief, sharing what you noticed about your experience in each role and what you discovered about yourself.
5. Take a moment to integrate this new learning into your ongoing sense of self in relationship to others, creating more safety and trust in relationships. Let yourself take in the good news that exercises like deep listening are strengthening your pre-frontal cortex, and allow even more new conditioning as you go along.

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### Exercise #21: Seeing the Goodness That Others See in You

We need to be able to take in the good that others see in us as real, if we are to re-wire our sense of ourselves to include our strengths and competencies. But we may find it much more difficult to receive the love and compassion than to receive it. We may “smallify” ourselves, rather than letting the love and goodwill of others nourish and resource us. We need to be able to take in the positive views others have of us, receive their messages and encode them in our neural circuitry, in order to re-wire our old views of ourselves, especially when we might believe something quite different, something less positive, less resilient.

1. Settle comfortably in your chair, or lie comfortably on the floor or in bed. Allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your attention on your breathing. Rest comfortably in the simple presence of awareness. When you’re ready, let yourself become aware of how you are holding yourself in this moment. Are you feeling kind toward yourself? Are you uneasy with yourself? Are you feeling critical of yourself? Just noticing, just awareness and acceptance of what is, without judgment, or if there is judgment, noticing that.
2. Then, when you’re ready, bring to mind someone in your life who you know unconditionally, genuinely loves you. Someone in whose very presence you feel safe. This could be a teacher or dear friend; this could be a partner or parent or a child; this could be your beloved dog or cat. This could be a spiritual figure – Quan Yin or the Dalai Lama, or your own Wiser Self. A memory from any time in your life when someone simply accepted you as you are, and loved you.
3. Imagine yourself sitting with them face to face. Notice how they are looking at you - with such acceptance and tenderness, such love, such joy. Feel yourself taking in their love, their acceptance of you.
4. Now imagine yourself being them, looking at you, looking at yourself through their eyes. You – being them – seeing yourself as they see you. All the love and openness, feel that as though you were them, feeling it toward yourself. See in yourself the goodness, the sacred humanness, the profound OK-ness they see in you. Let yourself linger, savoring your own goodness as they would see you.

5. Now come back to being yourself. You are in your own body again, experiencing them looking at you again, with so much love and acceptance. Feel yourself taking in their love, their acceptance. Take the love deeply into your own being. Feel it in your body. Notice where you feel that love and acceptance in your body, a smile, a warmth in your heart center, and savor it.

6. Take a moment to reflect on your experience. You are creating a positive resource for re-conditioning past negative views of your self. Set the intention to remember this feeling any time you choose to.

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### Exercise #22: Accepting the Many Parts of Our Self

Our psychological “self” is actually a constellation of many “selves,” an integration of different patterns of neural firing that encode the various memories or mental representations of different aspects of our “self.” These many selves can cover a broad range between self-at-best and self-at-worst, and many manifestations of resilient or less-than-resilient connections with others. Our resilience depends as much on how intelligently we relate to all these inner aspects of ourselves as it does on how skillfully we relate to others.

Be-friending our selves simply means being willing to look at all parts of ourselves - the good, the bad, the ugly - with honesty and clarity, with kindness and tenderness. To open our hearts and minds to the truth of this multiplicity of selves, without flinching, without self-hatred or condemnation, with an eye to appreciating the complex results of our all too human conditioning – how we have come to become who we are.

Resilience requires acknowledging, allowing, accepting all of the rebellious or reluctant parts of our self simply as parts of ourself. Embracing these inner parts brings us to an integrated wholeness of our authentic self, and it is what the pre-frontal cortex has matured to do.

1. Settle comfortably in your seat. Allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your attention on your breathing. Rest comfortably in the awareness of the inner presence of simply being.
2. When you’re ready, imagine you are outside a theater, a stage theater where they present plays. Imagine the building, the doors, the posters outside. When you’re ready, walk up to one of the doors, open it, walk into the lobby and on through the lobby to one of the doors into the auditorium, open that door and walk into the empty theater. Walk all the way down to the first or second row and take a seat in the center of the row. Now you’re seeing an empty stage in front of you. All is quiet.
3. Now imagine the first figure to come out on the stage is your Wiser Self, standing in the center where you can see them clearly. This is a figure that to you represents wisdom, strength, courage, compassion, competence, acceptance; all the qualities you aspire to.
4. Now we’re going to imagine other characters on the stage one by one. All of these imaginary characters embody a particular quality about yourself. So these characters could be someone you

know, yourself at a different age, someone you know from the movies or history or literature; they could even be an animal or cartoon character.

a. The first character embodies a quality about yourself you really, really like, any quality at all, just something you feel very positive about yourself. Take a moment to let that character on the stage, remember them, perhaps jot them down.

b. Now a second character comes on stage embodying another positive quality about yourself you really, really like. Take a moment to let that character materialize on the stage, remember them, perhaps jot them down.

c. Now a third character comes on stage embodying yet another positive quality about yourself that you really, really like. Take a moment to let them materialize, remember them, jot them down.

d. Now you have three characters on stage that embody three different qualities about yourself that you really, really like, and your Wiser Self. Take a moment to see and remember them all.

e. Now, you bring a fourth character to the stage that embodies a quality about yourself that you really don't like all that much. In fact, you wish it weren't true, but you know it is. And this character embodying a negative or afflictive quality about you comes on stage; take a moment to materialize this character, remember them, jot them down.

f. Now you bring on a fifth character that embodies another negative or afflictive quality about you; take a moment to materialize them and remember them, jot them down.

g. Now you bring on the last character, a sixth character embodying just one more negative or afflictive quality about yourself, a quality you don't like very much and wish weren't true but it is. Take a moment to materialize them, remember them, jot them down.

5. Now you have on stage your Wiser Self, three characters embodying positive qualities and three characters embodying negative qualities. In your imagination, take whatever time you need to ask each character in turn, the positive ones first, then the negative ones, what special gift they bring to you by being part of you. As you listen to their response, notice what lesson do you get to learn from them by their being a part of you. Ask each character, and listen carefully to what they have to say to you. Each one has some wisdom or learning to offer.

6. After you have engaged in this dialogue with each part, ask you4 Wiser Self also, what gifts these parts have to offer you; what lessons can you learn. And listen for the answers.

7. Now, in your imagination, briefly thank each character for coming to be with you in this way today. Watch as each exits off the stage one by one, the Wiser Self last. Then imagine yourself getting up out of your seat, walking to the aisle, walking back up the aisle out of the auditorium, through the lobby and back outside the theater. Turn around to look at the theater where this all

happened. Then slowly come to awareness again of sitting quietly, and when you're ready, open your eyes.

8. Take a moment to remember and embrace the lessons of each of these six characters, especially the “negative” ones, as an integral part of you, essential to your wholeness. The lessons are part of your internal secure base, too.

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### Exercise #23: Wished For Outcome for Relationships

Re-conditioning doesn't change what happened before, but it changes our relationship to what happened before. Re-conditioning doesn't re-write history, but it does re-wire the brain. You can practice this technique with memories that are not emotionally fraught. Eventually you can use this protocol to resolve memories that truly were traumatizing.

1. Sit comfortably in your chair or lie comfortably on the floor or bed. Focus your attention on your breathing, breathing calmly and deeply into your heart center. Call to mind a particular moment of ease and well-being. Or a particular sense of your own goodness. Or a particular moment when you felt safe, loved, connected, cherished. Or specific people who love you, who believe in you. Remember one of these moments in as much detail as you can, in as many levels of your body-brain as you can – a visual image, the feelings that the memory evokes, where you feel those feelings in your body, any thoughts you have about yourself now as you remember the sweetness of that moment then. Let yourself savor this moment in a mindful and compassionate “holding” of the memory.

2. When you feel bathed in the good feeling and are still anchored in the larger awareness of safety in the present moment, call to mind a moment of experience when things went awry between you and another person, however slight or terrible, a hiccup or a hurricane. (But chunk down the terrible to one little bit of it. Start with a small storm and work up to the hurricane.) As you go back into the memory of that moment, imagining what was happening quite vividly, remain in your observer role rather than getting sucked into the experience again. Evoke this memory to light up all the neural networks – visual images, body sensations, emotions, thoughts or beliefs at the time. Memories of what you said and did, what someone else said or did; who else was there; how old you were and how old they were; what you were wearing and what they were wearing. Maybe you wish you could have said or done something differently at the time, but didn't. Maybe you wish someone else had done something differently at the time, even if that could never have happened in real life. Remember the moment, the feelings of the moment, in as much detail as you can.

3. Then, in your imagination, begin to visualize a wished for outcome. What you wish could have happened differently. What you would have said or done differently. What the other person could have done differently, even if this never could have happened in real life. What someone else not even in the original scenario could have said or done. Perhaps you even wish none of this had happened at all. You can imagine what would have happened if this event hadn't happened. Imagine the new scenario in as much detail as you can. Let the new story

unfold as you would have wished. You are creating a scenario that completely disconfirms or contradicts what happened before.

4. Hold the two scenarios in your awareness at the same time. (Or toggle back and forth between them, always refreshing and strengthening the newer, more positive scenario.) After a few moments, “let go” of the old memory and just rest your attention in the new scenario. Let your mind play out this new scenario, and then notice how you feel. Notice any emotions or thoughts or beliefs about yourself that come up now, and if they are more positive, resilient, let them soak in. Then bring your awareness back to the present moment.

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#### Exercise #24: Taking in the Innate Goodness of Others

*Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in the eyes of the Divine. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, nor more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. ...I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. – Thomas Merton*

1. Invite a friend to do this exercise with you. Sit across from each other so that you can maintain eye contact. Do the entire guided meditation together in a spacious silence.
2. Simply gaze into your partner’s eyes, allowing yourself to see in them the nobility of their true nature. Their innate goodness and radiance of their being, and silently wish them well, sending them expressions of loving kindness: may you know the deepest happiness, may you have ease of mind and heart. Let yourself know that, at the same time, your partner is sending you expressions of loving kindness as well. Let yourself taking in the kindness being offered you.
3. Then allow your awareness to shift. Imagine what human sorrows your partner might have experienced in their journey, what losses, what griefs, what pain of the human condition. Silently begin to send them expressions of compassion: May your sorrows be held in loving awareness, may your sorrow ease, may you feel my care for your suffering. And let yourself know that, at the same time, your partner is sending you compassion for your sorrow and suffering as well. Let yourself take in the care and compassion being offered to you.
4. Then allow your awareness to shift. Imagine what human joys your partner may have experienced in their journey. What accomplishments and competencies they might have achieved. What blessings of abundance and love they might have experienced. And silently begin to send them expressions of sympathetic joy, happiness for their happiness. May you fully delight in your delight; may you feel your joy deeply. And allow yourself to know that, at the same time, your partner is sending you expressions of joy in your joy as well. Let yourself take in the sweetness of their joy in your joy.

5. Then allow your awareness to shift again to expressing wishes for calm abiding to your partner, wishes for equanimity: Whatever happens on your journey, may you perceive and respond to it with a calm ease of mind and heart. May you have deep inner peace. And allow yourself to know that, at the same time, your partner is sending you expressions of the wish for equanimity, for calm abiding for you as well. Let yourself take in the calming energy of their well-wishing.

6. Allow your awareness to shift one more time to simply being in your own being, noticing whatever is going on for you right now. Awareness of your inner experience, and awareness of your awareness. Take a moment to notice....and reflect....Notice any changes in your inner subjective sense of self. You may notice a sense of spaciousness, less defensiveness, more openness.

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### Exercise #25: Expressing Your Own Emotions; Reading the Meaning of the Other's Emotions

Expressing your emotions to others and reading their emotional signals back to you as well are essential for accurate and efficient communication among friend or foe. You will need to do this exercise with a partner in order to activate the resonance circuit we use to read and express emotions well.

1. You will practice feeling within yourself five of the most basic emotions – anger (from irritation to rage), fear (from worry to terror), sadness (from oh pooh to overwhelming grief), joy (from delight to euphoria), disgust (from annoyance to contempt) – and then conveying your experience of those emotions to your partner. It's far easier to recover our capacities for attunement by practicing with core emotions; we can refine our capacities to read more nuanced emotions such as disappointment, jealousy, guilt, curiosity, etc. as we go along.

2. Decide the order in which you will evoke each of these five emotions within yourself without telling your partner. Memories of previous experiences of each emotion is a quick and easy way for you to experience the emotion again internally. For purposes of this exercise, you'll be using your facial expressions, gestures, body posture, tone of voice, prosody (the rhythm) of voice to convey each of these core emotions to your partner in turn, but not words! Remember, researchers have found that only 7% of the meaning of an emotion is conveyed through words. We're eliminating the use of words specifically to strengthen the right hemisphere of the pre-frontal cortex – the emotional brain – to comprehend and interpret these signals.

3. Tune in to your own experience of the first emotion you've chosen to work with, and then "display" the chosen emotion to your partner for ten seconds as you maintain eye contact with them. You can make gestures, sounds, and use facial expression, just not your words. You may find yourself exaggerating your expressions at first, until you get comfortable with the exercise; that's OK. Your partner makes his or her own notes about which emotion he or she is reading from your expression, but doesn't disclose anything yet. Without discussion yet, turn your attention inward again. Release the emotion you've been expressing with a few gentle, deep breaths into your heart center, evoke the next emotion on your list, and then "display" that

second emotion to your partner for ten seconds. Again, your partner takes his or her own notes, but the two of you don't discuss anything yet. Still without any discussion yet, re-focus your attention inward, evoke the next emotion on the list and display the feeling to your partner.

4. Notice what happens inside of you – self-attunement – as you communicate your own feelings to someone else. Notice if the felt sense of the emotion increases, decreases, or changes into something else. When you have completed displaying all five emotions, your partner then shares his or her best guess at each emotion you were displaying in turn. This is a practice in conditioning empathy. Your expression of emotion is meant to convey meaning to the other person. You're checking in to see if their interpretation of your experience is accurate to you. If all the guesses were accurate, congratulations to both of you! If there were discrepancies, frame it as a learning opportunity; you and your partner can discuss what your partner was perceiving in your expression that led them to their decision.

5. When it is your turn to attune to your partner, (they follow the same instructions you followed previously), notice what signals you pay attention to, the facial expressions, the body language, the tone or rhythm of their voice, to distinguish one emotion from another. And, notice what happens inside of you – self-attunement – as you perceive your partner's feelings. Take notes if you wish as you go along, so you can share your impressions accurately with your partner later.

6. When your partner has finished his turn, share the label you gave for each of your partner's emotional expressions. Again, discuss any discrepancies, any misses in the empathy, in what your partner meant to convey and what you were picking up. You are each strengthening the pre-frontal cortex's capacities for expressing and attuning to emotions, the foundation of building more competence in communicating what you need, in developing the skills you need to get those needs met, and in empathizing with others as they express their needs.

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#### Exercise #26: Compassion for the Situation; Compassion for the Emotion

A wave of emotion last 8 seconds on average. That means any emotion – anger, sadness, joy – naturally arises and flows through the body quickly. One of the ways we can skillfully process an emotion – perceive it, acknowledge it, be with it, take whatever information is useful from it, and then let the wave move through the body (as it naturally will if we don't grip it or feed it) - is to expand our field of awareness to a consciousness that is larger than any belief or story about the emotion.

1. Identify one particular challenge in your life right now, then identify one specific emotion arising from these circumstances that you would like to be able to be with, but not be overwhelmed by.
2. Find a quiet place to sit quietly or lie down comfortably on the bed or floor, where you won't be disturbed for 10 minutes. Come into a sense of presence in your body; find a place in your body where you can sense some peacefulness and ease. (This may be your heart center; it may also be your elbow or your big toe.) Let your awareness drop below any stories, any worries,

any concerns, into a sense of inner peace and rest. (Some practitioners describe this part of the practice as dropping below the storms on the surface of the ocean to the gentle flow of deep water 30 feet under the surface.)

3. From this place of peacefulness, call to mind your Wiser Self, the imaginary resource who knows you and loves you, who knows and has compassion for your situation, who can empathize with and have compassion for all the emotions you are experiencing as a result of this particular challenge. Experience yourself as your Wiser Self in this exercise, holding and managing with mindful empathy any heavy emotions you will be working with.

3. Establish a rhythm of breathing: on the inhale, breathe in one small portion of the fear, anger, grief you might be feeling into the larger sense of empathy and compassion that can hold it. On the exhale, breathe out that small portion of the negative emotion, sending empathy and compassion to yourself as you release the emotion. (A wave of emotion last about 8 seconds; a breath lasts about 8 seconds; a nice evolutionary synchrony we use to our advantage in this exercise.) On the next inhale, breathe in another small portion of the fear, anger, or grief you might be experiencing into the larger sense of empathy and compassion that can hold it; on the exhale breathe out that small portion of the negative emotion, sending empathy and compassion to your self as you release it. You're not yet discerning what wise action might arise from this emotion (though later you might). You're simply letting it in, letting it be, and letting it go.

4. Continue this rhythm of breathing for 5-10 minutes. You can breathe in the elements of the situation you find yourself in, breathing them out with the empathy and compassion for being in that situation; you can breathe in the shifting emotions you find yourself experiencing, breathing them out with empathy and compassion for feeling them.

5. As you bring this compassion practice to a close, notice any changes you may feel in your body now, any deeper peacefulness from tapping into the mindful empathy and compassion that is larger than any of the emotions moving through it.

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#### Exercise #27: Gratitude practice

Cultivating positive emotions can actually “undo” the constricting effects negative emotions have on our behaviors, moving us beyond the narrow band of our default survival responses to more resilient options. These positive emotions that *broaden* habitual modes of thinking or acting actually *build* enduring personal resources that last beyond the moment of the emotion itself, such as increasing social bonds and social support, deepening insights that help place events in a broader context and alter world views. Positive emotions even fuel brain development and re-wiring. Positive emotions are not simply an outcome of skillful coping; they directly contribute to resilience.

*At times our own light goes out and is re-kindled by the spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.*

*- Albert Schweitzer*

1. Take 5-10 minutes to pause from the ongoing demands of your life, and begin to think of some of the many people that are helping you keep your life going in this moment: someone who helped you find your reading glasses when you were distracted by rushing on to the next thing; a friend who sent a supportive e-mail when your nephew wrecked your car (though not himself!); the grocery clerk who promptly swept up the jelly jars your exuberant 3-year old knocked off the shelf; a co-worker who took over your duties for the day when a nasty flu simply would not let you get out of bed.
2. Take a moment to focus on any feelings of gratitude these memories evoke; notice where you feel the sensations of gratitude as you let them resonate in your body.
3. Expand the circle of your awareness to gratitude for the people staffing your local hospital right now, in case you slip on a rug on the way to the bathroom, break a bone in your foot or wrist, and have to be rushed to the emergency room. You might include people staffing airports, pharmacies, fire stations, gas stations, those testing water quality at the municipal reservoir so that when you turn on the kitchen faucet you have drinkable water to drink. (For years my brother Barry was on call in his home town to drive the snow plow at 3am so folks could get to work at 7am. I know how deeply he appreciated being appreciated for that humble service.) Practice gratitude for the people growing our food and recycling your garbage, for the entire web of life that keeps our life going, moment to moment to moment.
4. Take a moment to reflect on your experience of practicing gratitude and the feelings your practice evokes. Notice any changes in your own emotions or thoughts about yourself as you focus on experiencing gratitude.
5. If you wish, set the intention to do a 3-minute gratitude practice every day for 30 days, focusing your attention on the people, circumstances, and resources that sustain your well-being every day. Over time, this practice will cause you to experience more other positive emotions as well, and expand your choices of actions to be more positive, more resilient.

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#### Exercise #28: Finding Emotionally Healthy Brains to Hang Out With

More and more “hanging out” with people happens these days via social media on the internet. For purposes of skillfully re-wiring your brain for resilience, it’s truly more effective to find ways to hang out with real people in real time. If that’s not possible in a busy life, or when the people you especially enjoy hanging out with live at a great distance, connecting by phone or e-mail still re-wires your brain in a positive direction.

1. Identify someone you would like to share your experiences of positive emotions with, to broaden and build your resilience repertoire. Ask this person to be your gratitude buddy, or your joy buddy, someone you will share resilience-building with.

2. Arrange a regular process for checking in. Once a week for coffee? Once a month for a walk in nature? Every evening by e-mail? Experiment and discover what works best for both of you over time.
3. During your check-in, share moments of the positive emotion you're working with - acknowledging moments of laughter in the midst of trouble or uncertainty; recognizing moments of contentment in the midst of upheaval and change; appreciating moments of friendliness in a hectic no-room-to-breathe kind of day. Recall how you felt in the moment when you experienced the laughter, friendliness, or contentment; notice how you feel now as you recall it. Listen to your buddy's check-in; notice how you feel hearing her experiences. It's most helpful when this hanging out and sharing stays open and receptive; this is not a time for advice giving or problem solving.
4. Notice how you feel at the end of the check-in. Take in the good of the experience to reinforce the re-wiring in your neural circuitry.
5. Thank your partner for the positive hanging out. You can notice the positive emotions continuing as you schedule the next time to check in. Because cultivating specific positive emotions tends to lead to experiencing others, you may notice over time that other positive pro-social emotions may develop - of affection, respect, even love for your partner - as a result of this practice.

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#### Exercise #29: Taking in the Good

We can be so busy in our lives, we don't take the time to take in the good, so we miss out on how nourishing such moments are in developing the base of resilience. We receive the good like water running through a sieve; it all runs through; nothing lasts, rather than a cup that retains what is nourishing and healing. When we pause to take in the good, as we remember and repeat this encoding, many times a day over a sustained period of time, we create a memory bank of positivity that becomes a great support to our base of resilience.

These new experiences of taking in the good re-wire our sense of self-acceptance, fill the holes in our heart, and strengthen our inner stability and flexibility. It becomes easier to feel that we belong, that we matter, which deepens our confidence about ourselves in relationship to the world.

1. Take a moment to remember a moment of kindness, of understanding, of "feeling felt" as they happen in your day. For instance, someone lets you cut in front of them in line at the corner deli when you're desperate to get change before the meter maid tickets your car. Someone notices you picked up the trash left by a park bench and smiles as you walk by. A colleague stops you in the hall to say "good job" after a presentation or offers you a handful of cherries from her lunch. A new neighbor brings you homemade lasagna after you've spent six hours moving into a new apartment in the pouring rain, and then checks the next morning to make sure you're okay. Any such moment of kindness.

2. Pause to let the memory of that experience register in your mind and body. Notice how this moment of connection makes you feel: perhaps acknowledged, included, happy.

3. Take in the felt sense of this goodness in your body – a warmth, a relaxation, an opening. Notice what fills your heart – perhaps gratitude, joy, peace.

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### Exercise#30: Healing Toxic Shame through Love and Acceptance

*Love makes your soul crawl out of its hiding place. – Zora Neale Hurston*

1. As always, when using re-conditioning to re-wire old patterns of coping that can be de-railing, even toxic, to your resilience, resource yourself first. Settle into your own mindful empathy, your willingness to see and your willingness to care. Evoke a sense of your Wiser Self that can bring mindful empathy to this entire process. Bring to mind a moment of your own understanding and having deep compassion for someone else's struggles with self-acceptance. Someone who missed qualifying for a state athletic tournament by two points. Someone who left at home the videos they had planned to show at a regional training meeting. Notice the caring compassion of your Wiser Self flowing from your own heart to them.

2. With the resource of your own compassionate acceptance of another in the background, bring to your awareness a memory of a small moment of your own guilt or shame. You forgot to leave the car windows cracked open when you dashed into the drugstore; running into a friend delayed your return, and your new puppy in the back seat almost collapsed of heat prostration. At your daughter's pre-school, you blurted out the news of one of the teacher's cancer diagnosis in front of a group of parents. You got a speeding ticket with a potential client in the car. Shame and guilt can carry such an intense charge that it feels like there's nothing "small" at all about these feelings. Chunk it down; take just one small piece of it. Just the first moment or one small piece of the conversation. As you "light up the networks" of this memory, small but vivid, keep the compassionate awareness of your Wiser Self steady. You want to be *with* your experience but not *in* it. "Affected but not infected."

3. When this memory is vivid (but not overwhelming!), bring to mind a memory of feeling genuinely seen and deeply loved and accepted by someone – a moment of feeling loved and cherished with a good friend or partner, even a moment of being seen for real. Pets work great here by the way. Let yourself receive this love and acceptance as a felt sense in your body.

4. Then hold the memory of shame/guilt *and* the memory of love/acceptance together in your awareness at the same time. Or toggle back and forth, as you have learned to do, always strengthening the memory of love and acceptance.

5. When this simultaneous awareness of the re-paired memories is steady, bring to the foreground that initial feeling of understanding and compassion that you had directed to someone else who had felt the same kind of shame or guilt you might be feeling. Begin to direct that same

flow of love and acceptance toward the shame or guilt in yourself. You are “sending” love and acceptance toward the memory or the part of yourself connected with it, and that memory or part of you is receiving it. Stay with this double re-pair for a few moments, the memory of shame or guilt pairing with your love and acceptance of someone else, and also pairing with the self-love and self-acceptance of your own Wiser Self. After a moment, let go of the pairings and let your attention rest solely in the experience of self-love and self-acceptance. Take a few moments to savor the resting in this self-love and self-acceptance.

6. Take a moment to reflect on your experience. Notice any shifts you experience from doing this exercise. Repeat this process of re-conditioning as many times as you need to fully “dissolve” this shame or guilt connected with a particular memory. The more often you practice this process with specific memories, the more you will be releasing and re-programming those deep neural networks associated with toxic shame.

7. You may share this experience with your gratitude buddy or joy buddy as a way of taking in the good of re-wiring your brain toward more emotional competence. Notice any gratitude or joy as you share.

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### Exercise #31: Learning Resilience

*We all accept that no one controls the weather. Good sailors learn to read it carefully and respect its power. They will avoid storms if possible, but then caught in one, they know when to take down the sails, batten down the hatches, drop anchor and ride things out, controlling what is controllable and letting go of the rest. Training, practice, and a lot of firsthand experience in all sorts of weather are required to develop such skills so that they work for you when you need them. Developing skill in facing and effectively handling the various “weather conditions” in your life is what we mean by the art of conscious living.*

*- Jon Kabat-Zinn*

Identify one attribute of resilience you would like to cultivate more of, or a behavior that your resilience now would support you growing into – assertiveness, collaboration, fairness, generosity. Focus on that attribute as you go through this model. I will use assertiveness as an example, but please substitute your own choice as you wish, for as many qualities as you wish to go through this model with.

1. *Unconscious incompetence*: we don’t know how to do something, and we don’t even know that we don’t know. We’re innocent or clueless; the brain is in homeostasis here. The “ignorance is bliss” phase of learning, except, of course, when it isn’t.

Identify areas of your life where assertiveness seems to be lacking; it hasn’t even occurred to you that being assertive in this area of your life would be useful. Or whatever capacity you are wanting to cultivate.

2. *Conscious incompetence*: another “Oh, shit!” circuit. We don’t know how to do something, and “Uh, oh!” we come to realize, with some chagrin and horror, that we don’t know. If ever our resilience is going to de-rail, it’s right here. Old patterns of fear of failure, passivity or shame could re-surface. We choose to get past any denial or blocks to learning by re-framing this step as becoming competent by recovering a missing competency. When we harness the innate drive for mastery – to recover any missing competencies of coping and, in fact, master new skills, we can be proud of our recovered resilience in helping us move our competency and resilience forward yet again.

This is the “uh oh!” moment. Identify moments in your life when you could have been assertive, should have been assertive, (or whatever capacity you are cultivating) and had no clue how to do that. Maybe still have no clue how to do that. Hang in there; don’t retreat or procrastinate. Now is the moment to set the intention that this is one useful life skill you want to master. Set the intention to learn assertiveness by practicing it; experimenting with it. Set a second intention to see yourself, and feel proud of yourself, as someone who intentionally cultivates capacities of resilience.

3. *Conscious competence*: Through all of our new experiences, resources, tools and techniques, we are learning. The brain is re-wiring. New patterns of response are being stored in long-term memory. We are becoming masterful and competent. We spend a lot of our adult lives here, of course. At each moment of learning, now we know, and we know that we know. We claim that we know, in spite of old stories about ourselves that might linger. We don’t go back to the old stories, we persevere in the new; we take in the good, deepening and solidifying the circuits of the competency and of learning.

Whatever assertiveness workshops or classes you take or however many sessions you have practicing with friends, whatever real-life situations you practice on, notice your skills in being assertive steadily developing. It’s the awareness of the growing competency that’s key in this step. You see yourself becoming assertive; you know you are becoming assertive, you claim being assertive. Wiring that knowledge into your narrative of yourself.

4. *Unconscious competence*: Once we know how to do something well and practice doing it again and again, the new skill becomes wired in to our implicit procedural memory. Like learning to ride a bicycle. we don’t even have to think about it anymore. Our wise effort becomes increasingly effortless.

Catch a moment when you realize you were assertive, this morning or last week. Now you realize you exercised that skill without even thinking about it. Congratulations. Another competency supporting your resilience.

You can repeat this exercise as many times as you wish, with as many qualities you wish to cultivate for more resilience. Your learning is still coming from experience rather than concepts; from experiments rather than instructions. That’s what keeps re-wiring the brain in the most integrated and resilient fashion, lifelong.

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### Exercise #32: Wiring in Current Confidence from Previous Competence

“Sure I can!” is an important somatic resource of resilience. Researchers have found that the greatest predictor of success – in anything – is a previous track record of success – in anything. In other words, we don’t have to know for sure that we can deal with what we’re facing now because we have dealt well with it before. We recover our resilience when we know that we have dealt successfully with *anything* before.

1. Identify areas of your life where you would like to have more of the feeling of “Sure I can!” Returning to school after 30 years in the workforce; buying into a franchise; facing the empty nest when the last child has moved away.
2. Then identify three moments in your life where you actually had that sense of “I can!” in your body – a visceral sense of confidence arising from a moment of competence. Reflect not so much on what you did to cope, because that will change with circumstances, but how you felt when you realized that you had done it. Remember, we’re talking moments here, not major events: opening a stuck jar lid for your mom, intuiting which way to turn to find the train station in a strange city, intuiting just what to say when your child experienced a disappointment.
3. For now, don’t worry at all about the “size” of the success; focus more on the genuineness of the sense of mastery. How does that sense of mastery feels in your body now as you remember it? Take in the good of “I did – I can” as a body-based resource. Better modest and genuine than dramatic but “thin.”
4. Experiment with bringing the visceral sense in your body of “I did- I can” forward to the present moment and applying it in the areas you identified in step 1 where you would like to feel this confidence more often. You’re choosing to bring a sense of trust and mastery forward into a realm where you want to feel it now. Even the slightest success at doing this re-conditions your brain toward resilience.

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### Exercise #33: Getting Across the Threshold of “Uh Oh!”

When we deliberately face our fear of doing something new, something that could possibly go wrong or evoke deep doubts about ourselves as human beings, we come to the brink of that somatic threshold that would block us from moving forward or that would steer us back into the certain, the familiar, the comfortable.

By choosing to face the fear and intentionally cross the threshold into action, we are deliberately choosing to evoke new experiences that would re-condition the signal anxiety in our nervous system. By pairing an old pattern of fear or block with a new more positive pattern of courage and action, we contradict the old – re-conditioning at its finest - and we re-wire it.

1. In a group of four, each of you take two minutes to identify a new territory you would like to move into, a new competence you would like to build. Identify what is the visceral reaction of “Uh oh!” that comes up that would block you. Not necessarily a thought pattern or an emotion but the visceral feeling, the somatic marker of No-o-o-o. Then identify what 30 seconds of trying that new activity or trying out that new competence would look like. That would get you through that somatic block and get the reward of the dopamine going again. You would feel good if you had that 30 seconds worth of success.
2. Then take another minute each to reflect on what the process of brainstorming with others was like.

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### Exercise #34: Finding the Gift in the Mistake

It helps to “de-brief” a mistake by brainstorming about it with other folks. The many different perspectives help us discover the gift in the mistake and reduce our agony or judgment over it. When we’re having to deal with consequences that we would never wish on ourselves or anyone else, we can take comfort, we can find some equanimity in knowing we are strengthening our capacities to cope. We may not wish to have to become so bravely, tenaciously adaptive in our lives, but we can rejoice that we are.

*Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.*  
- John Wooden

In a group of four, “look for the gift in the mistake.”

1. Each person shares a common mistake first, the sort of mistake that anyone might make, to make it easier to draw on everyone’s experience to find the gift and to eventually tackle more challenging mistakes. Getting distracted and running a red light. Accidentally deleting all the e-mails confirming travel reservations; forgetting to enroll in COBRA in time and now having to appeal. Find some comfort (not judgment) in the universal imperfections of being human.
2. Then expand your sharing to include mistakes that had bigger consequences, externally – putting off going to the doctor until “just a cough” landed you in the hospital for a week of pneumonia – or internally –that hospitalization caused you to miss your daughter’s graduation from college; you live with the pangs of remorse and guilt still.
3. Let the compassionate reflection of others in the groups, as well as your own, allow you each to “own” the mistake, discern what lesson could be learned from it, and help you to find the gift in it:
  - a) this is what happened;
  - b) this is what I did to survive (understandable, even brilliant);
  - c) this has been the cost (compassion making it safe enough to even look at that);
  - d) this is what I have learned (a new narrative of self that allows us to live with, even be proud of, ourselves;

e) this is how I can respond to life now (be resilient going forward).

4. Even if the “gift” is a deeper intention to pay attention as we careen through our days, or to be kinder to ourselves in our imperfect humanity, we have found the gift.

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As you persevere in these many practices to rewire your brain for resilience, remember the bottom line practices offered by the beloved cartoon character Snoopy: Live well. Laugh often. Love much.