



Activities Inside	Mapping Self-Trust Look back at the moments that shaped how you learned to trust, doubt, or silence yourself, and begin to understand how your reactions developed over time. Safe Place Collage Use images, colors, and symbols to create a visual representation of safety so your mind and body have a place to return to when things feel overwhelming. Understanding Your Nervous System States Explore how your body moves between calm, overwhelm, and shutdown so your reactions start to make sense instead of feeling unpredictable. Embracing Shadow Parts Gently explore the sides of yourself you judge, hide, or want to get rid of, and begin to understand what they learned to do to protect you. Wise Self Collage Create a collage of images and words that represent support, belonging, and strength to help you reconnect with the part of you that can guide and care for yourself. Learning to Hear Your Yes and Your No Practice noticing the subtle signals in your body that tell you what feels right, wrong, safe, or unsafe, so you can begin to trust your instincts again. Resources for Continued Learning and Growth
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Introduction

Certain difficult or traumatic experiences can force you stop trusting in yourself and intuition

Over time, you may notice that you second-guess your reactions, look to other people for answers, or feel unsure about what you want, feel, or believe. You might ignore your instincts, talk yourself out of your feelings, or assume that you are the problem. This does not happen because something is wrong with you. It often happens because, at some point, trusting yourself did not feel safe.

Many people lose self-trust after experiences where their emotions were dismissed, their boundaries were not respected, or their reality was questioned. You may have learned that being honest about what you felt led to conflict, rejection, punishment, confusion, or disconnection. You may have had to stay quiet, stay strong, stay helpful, mask, or stay in control just to get through. When this happens, the nervous system often shifts toward survival. Instead of asking, *What do I feel?*, the mind starts asking, *What do I need to do to stay safe?*

Over time, this can make your internal signals harder to hear. You may feel disconnected from your body, unsure of your instincts, or pulled in different directions. Reactions like overthinking, shutting down, people-pleasing, staying guarded, or needing control are not personal failures. They are patterns that may have helped you survive. This journey is about reconnecting with yourself in ways that

feel safe enough, slow enough, and flexible enough for your system to believe.

Using This Workbook

This workbook is designed to help you reconnect with yourself step by step.

The exercises use reflection, drawing, collage, and body awareness to help you understand how your relationship with yourself developed, how your nervous system responds to stress, and how different parts of you learned to cope. You will explore the sides of yourself you feel comfortable with, the ones you struggle with, and the ones you may have learned to hide. You will also begin reconnecting with the part of you that can be steady, caring, and wise, even if it feels far away right now.

You do not need to do this perfectly.

You do not need to remember everything.

You do not need to do it in order if that feels too hard.

You can go slowly.

You can take breaks.

You can skip anything that feels like too much.

These exercises build on each other:

You will begin by looking at your story and how self-trust changed over time.

Then you will create a sense of safety your system can return to.

You will explore how your body responds to stress, how protective reactions developed, and how to reconnect with inner support.

Finally, you will practice listening for your own yes and no and noticing where you have choice in the present.

A note

There is no one right way to notice yourself.

You may remember things in fragments instead of in order.

You may feel body signals strongly, faintly, late, or not at all in the moment.

You may prefer words, lists, screenshots, stickers, voice notes, movement, or digital collage over drawing.

You may need sensory comfort, reduced demands, or very small steps.

All of that counts.

If “I don’t know” comes up, that is not failure. It is information. Research on interoception in autism and ADHD suggests that body awareness can be highly variable, so this workbook is built to allow flexibility rather than assume everyone experiences internal signals the same way.

Before you begin

This workbook may bring up emotion, grief, anger, numbness, or confusion. Go slowly. If you start to feel flooded, disconnected, dizzy, shut down, or highly agitated, pause and come back later. If trauma symptoms are intense or you find yourself feeling overwhelmed for long periods, it may help to use this workbook alongside therapy or other support. NIMH recommends seeking help when trauma reactions are severe, persistent, or interfering with daily life.

A simple pause:

- Look around the room
- Feel your feet on the floor
- Name five things you can see
- Take one slower exhale than inhale
- Ask, “Do I want to continue, stop, or come back later?”

Activity 1: Mapping Self-Trust

Many people feel like they have always struggled to trust themselves, but when we look more closely, that is often not true. Many of us can remember times earlier in life when our feelings made sense, our instincts felt clearer, or we knew what we wanted without so much second-guessing.

Over time, certain experiences can change that. Criticism, trauma, pressure, rejection, being misunderstood, gaslighting, chronic stress, or masking can teach us to question ourselves. We may learn that it feels safer to stay quiet, go along, disconnect, or override

what we feel inside. When this happens repeatedly, self-doubt can start to feel like part of who we are, even though it developed for a reason.

This activity helps you look back gently and notice how your relationship with yourself changed over time. Instead of seeing self-doubt as a flaw, you may begin to see how it formed in response to what you went through.

Why this may help

Research suggests that trauma can disrupt how people make sense of their story and integrate difficult experiences into a coherent sense of self. Meaning-making and narrative work can support self-understanding and reduce shame by helping people place reactions in context.

Materials

- Paper or workbook page
- Pen, pencil, or marker
- Optional: colored pencils, highlighters, or crayons
- Optional: stickers or symbols
- Optional (digital): notes app, tablet, Canva, or timeline app

Alternative options

- Write words instead of drawing
- Make a list instead of a line
- Use voice notes instead of writing
- Use colors only

Access and adaptations

You do not need exact dates.

You can map by life chapters instead of years.

You can use colors, symbols, emojis, voice notes, or a notes app.

If memory is spotty, fragmented, or nonlinear, that is okay.

Getting started

Take a moment to think about your life so far.

- When do I remember feeling most like myself?
- Were there times when trusting my feelings felt easier or more natural?
- When do I remember starting to doubt myself more?
- Were there experiences where my feelings were ignored, criticized, or not believed?
- Did I learn that it was safer to stay quiet, go along, mask, or hide what I felt?
- Are there times when I had to be strong, responsible, helpful, or careful instead of honest?
- Do certain ages, seasons, identities, relationships, or life periods stand out when I think about self-trust?

Directions

1. Draw a line across the page from left to right. The left side represents earlier life. The right side represents the present.
2. Mark important moments or periods along the line.
3. Use words, colors, shapes, symbols, or short phrases.
4. Include moments when you trusted yourself. These may be times when you felt clear, confident, free, aligned, or more like yourself.
5. Include moments when you began doubting yourself. These may be times when you felt criticized, rejected, confused, unsafe, or pulled away from yourself.
6. Include times when you ignored your feelings to stay safe. For example, staying quiet, masking, going along, overachieving, people-pleasing, or disconnecting.
7. Include times when you had to grow up quickly, perform, or take on too much.
8. Include times when you felt proud, strong, connected, or more whole.
9. You do not have to include everything. Focus on what feels most meaningful right now.
10. If strong emotions come up, pause and come back later.

Reflection

- What patterns do I notice?
- When did my self-trust seem strongest?
- When did I begin questioning myself more?
- What experiences made it feel unsafe to trust my feelings?
- What rules did I learn about myself?
- Which of those rules still feel true?
- Which of those rules may have helped me then, but do not fit me now?
- What do I feel toward myself as I look at this timeline?

Activity 2: Safe Place Collage

Rebuilding trust with yourself often begins with some sense of safety. When your nervous system feels overwhelmed, tense, overloaded, or on alert, it can be hard to hear your own thoughts clearly or know what you really feel.

A safe place collage helps you create a visual representation of comfort, steadiness, and support. This does not have to be a literal place. It can be a feeling, an environment, a collection of sensory cues, or a picture of what “less unsafe” might feel like.

Why this may help

Creative-arts approaches and guided imagery may support regulation, emotional expression, and trauma recovery, though results vary by person and study. The strongest evidence supports using these practices as flexible, supportive tools rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

Materials

- Paper, poster board, or workbook page
- Magazines, printed pictures, or photos
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- Optional: stickers, washi tape, fabric, textured paper
- Optional (digital): Canva, Pinterest, phone photos, collage app

Alternative options

- Draw instead of using pictures
- Make a digital collage
- Write words only
- Choose colors only
- Make a list of things that feel safe

Access and adaptations

If “safe” feels too far away, use:

- less unsafe
- comforting
- steady
- grounding
- tolerable

You can make this with magazine clippings, screenshots, Canva, Pinterest, a mood board, color blocks, or a list of sensory supports. Choose what feels regulating, not what looks prettiest.

Getting started

- When do I feel most calm or least activated?
- Where do I feel most like myself?
- What colors, textures, sounds, or places feel soothing?
- What people, animals, memories, routines, or interests help me settle?
- What does comfort feel like in my body, if I can notice it?
- What would I want safety to feel like, even if I have not felt it much?

Directions

1. Create a collage that represents safety, comfort, steadiness, or calm.
2. Use images, colors, words, textures, or symbols.
3. Include places, people, animals, objects, or sensory details that feel supportive.
4. Your collage can include real places, imagined places, or things you wish existed.
5. If direct safety is hard to imagine, create a collage of what helps you feel a little more settled.
6. When you finish, look at it for a few moments and notice what happens.

Reflection

- What stands out to me?
- Do I feel more relaxed, more tense, or neutral as I look at it?
- What parts feel most comforting?
- What parts feel unfamiliar?
- Could I return to this image in my mind later?
- What would make it feel even more supportive?

Activity 3: Understanding Your Nervous System States

Many people struggle to trust themselves because their internal state changes without warning. One moment you may feel clear or connected; another moment you may feel activated, overwhelmed, depleted, numb, or checked out. When this happens often, it can start to feel like something is wrong with you.

This activity helps you see these states visually so they feel less confusing. Instead of judging yourself for changing, you begin to notice patterns in how your body and mind respond to stress, uncertainty, demand, conflict, sensory overload, or connection.

Why this may help

Research suggests that noticing links between body sensations, emotions, and thoughts can support self-awareness and regulation. At the same time, interoception research in autism and ADHD shows a lot of variability, so body signals may be clear for some people and faint, delayed, mixed, or confusing for others.

Materials

- Paper or workbook page
- Pen or pencil
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers (optional)

Alternative options

- Draw shapes instead of people
- Use colors only
- Write words instead of drawing
- Use emojis or symbols
- Use a notes app or tablet
- Colored highlighters for different states
- Sticky notes for movable ideas

Access and adaptations

You do not have to draw a body.

You can draw weather, animals, colors, a battery icon, a traffic light, or a room.

If body sensations are hard to notice, focus on thoughts, urges, facial expression, posture, or what you tend to do.

Getting started

- When do I feel calm, connected, or more like myself?

- When do I feel anxious, tense, restless, irritated, or overloaded?
- When do I feel numb, tired, shut down, frozen, or far away?
- Do I notice mixed states, like tired and anxious at the same time?
- Do I trust myself more in some states than others?
- What situations tend to bring out each state?

Directions

1. Divide the page into three sections or use three pages.
2. In the first section, show yourself when you feel more connected, settled, or regulated.
3. In the second section, show yourself when you feel more activated, anxious, overloaded, or on edge.
4. In the third section, show yourself when you feel more shut down, numb, depleted, or disconnected.
5. You can use colors, shapes, words, body posture, environment, energy level, or thoughts.
6. Add anything that helps you recognize each state.
7. If you want, add a fourth section for “mixed” if that feels more accurate than neat categories.

Reflection

- Which state feels most familiar? Which state feels safest?
- Which state makes self-trust hardest?
- What usually moves me toward activation?
- What usually moves me toward shutdown or depletion?
- What helps me return to feeling more connected?
- How might it change things if I saw these reactions as nervous-system responses rather than personal flaws?

Activity 4: Embracing Shadow Parts

Everyone has sides of themselves they judge, hide, or want to get rid of. You might notice anger, jealousy, avoidance, people-pleasing, overthinking, shutting down, needing control, feeling “too much,” or feeling “not enough.” These reactions can carry a lot of shame.

In this workbook, “shadow parts” simply means the sides of you that are harder to accept. You do not have to use this language if it does not fit. You can think of this as meeting a side of yourself you usually push away.

This exercise is not about approving of every behavior. It is about understanding what these reactions may have learned to do for you.

Why this may help

Research on self-compassion and trauma suggests that people often do better when they respond to difficult internal experiences with understanding rather than harsh self-judgment. Compassion-focused and self-compassion approaches are associated with lower self-criticism and can support trauma recovery.

Materials

- Paper or workbook page
- Pen or pencil
- Markers / colored pencils (optional)
- Magazines for collage
- Stickers
- Clay or play-dough
- Digital drawing app

Access and adaptations

- Write instead of draw
- Use metaphors instead of images
- Describe the part in words
- Make a list of traits instead of a picture

If “shadow” feels too loaded, rename this exercise:

- A side of me I struggle with
- A protective reaction

- A part of me I feel ashamed of
- A pattern I want to understand

You only need to explore one reaction/activation at a time.

Getting started

- What reactions do I wish I did not have?
- When do I feel embarrassed by how I act or feel?
- What side of me do I hide from other people?
- What side of me do I hide from myself?
- When do I become harsh, avoidant, controlling, withdrawn, or flooded?
- What do I usually tell myself when this happens?

Directions

1. Draw, collage, or describe a side of you that you usually push away.
2. It does not have to look like a person. It can be an animal, symbol, object, weather pattern, abstract image, or a few words.
3. Around it, write what this side feels like when it shows up.
4. Then ask:
 - What might this be trying to prevent?
 - What might it be afraid of?
 - When did I first learn to respond this way?
 - What might this side need in order to relax a little?
5. If it helps, complete this sentence: “This part of me is trying to help by...”

Reflection

- What do I notice when I look at this?
- Does this part feel younger, older, or ageless?
- What might it have learned about the world?
- How do I usually treat it?
- What would it be like to respond with curiosity instead of criticism?
- What might this side need from me now?

Activity 5: Wise Self Collage

When self-trust has been shaken, it can be hard to feel like there is anyone inside you who knows what to do. But many people can gradually reconnect with a steadier, kinder, wiser part of themselves — not a perfect part, but a grounded one.

This collage is about gathering images of caregiving, belonging, support, and positive truths you want to grow toward. Your wise self does not have to feel fully real yet. You are allowed to imagine it first.

Why this may help

Self-compassion practices are associated with better mental health and may help reduce trauma-related distress and shame. Building compassionate inner language and visual reminders of care can support regulation and a more trusting relationship with yourself.

Materials

- Paper, poster board, or workbook page
- Magazines or printed pictures
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Markers / colored pencils / pens
- Optional: stickers, fabric, textured paper, photos
- Optional (digital): Canva, Pinterest, collage app

Helpful ideas to include

- Caregiving images
- Belonging images
- Positive words

- Nature
- Symbols
- Art / music / creativity

Access and adaptations

- Write words only
- Make a list of supportive phrases
- Draw symbols instead of images
- Use screenshots or saved photos
- Make a vision board digitally

If affirmations feel fake, use softer phrases:

- I am learning
- I am allowed to go slowly
- I can care for myself in small ways
- I can come back to myself
- I do not have to earn my worth

You can also borrow support from mentors, fictional characters, ancestors, values, nature, art, music, or special interests.

Getting started

When do I feel most supported?

What does being cared for feel like?

What helps me feel like I belong?

What words do I wish I heard more often?

What qualities feel steady, kind, or wise to me?

What would it feel like to trust myself a little more?

Directions

1. Create a collage that represents your wise self.
2. Include images of caregiving, support, protection, belonging, creativity, strength, softness, or calm.
3. Add words or phrases that feel comforting, true, or possible.
4. Choose images that help your body feel more settled or more open.
5. Your collage can include real experiences, imagined support, and things you wish you had received.

Reflection

- What stands out to me most?
- Which images feel easiest to receive?
- Which words feel hardest to believe?
- What feels comforting?
- What feels far away?
- If this collage could speak, what would it say to me?
- What would help me trust this part more?

Activity 6: Intuiting Your Yes and Your No

Many people lose trust in themselves after experiences where their feelings were ignored, dismissed, or not safe to express. Over time, you may learn to look outside yourself for answers instead of listening inward.

This exercise is about practicing contact with your own signals. Not everyone experiences “yes” and “no” clearly in the body. For some people, the signal is felt as energy, dread, relief, curiosity, tension, shutdown, sensory overload, or simply a strong preference. The goal is not certainty. The goal is listening.

Why this may help

Interoceptive and body-awareness practices may support decision-making and self-understanding, but trauma, autism, ADHD, alexithymia, and sensory overload can make these signals subtle or inconsistent. A neurodivergent-affirming version of this work makes room for ambiguity, delayed clarity, and non-body-based cues.

Materials

- Paper or workbook page
- Pen or pencil
- Colored pens for yes / no / unsure
- Body outline worksheet
- Rating scale (0–10)

Helpful extras

- Timer for pauses
- Calm space
- Water / comfort item

Access and adaptations

- Write instead of draw
- Use numbers instead of words
- Use emojis
- Use a notes app
- Speak answers out loud

If body signals are hard to notice, try rating each option on:

- energy
- dread
- relief
- curiosity
- pressure
- willingness
- sensory ease
- sensory strain

Start with tiny choices instead of big decisions.

Getting started

- Do I often second-guess myself?
- Do I ask other people what I should do before deciding?
- Do I feel confused about what I want?
- Have there been times when I ignored my instincts and regretted it?
- Have there been times when I trusted myself and it helped?
- What kinds of choices feel easiest? What kinds feel hardest?

Directions

1. Pick a simple, low-stakes situation. For example: take a break or keep going, text now or later, lights bright or dim, tea or water, stay or leave.
2. Imagine saying yes to one option.
3. Pause and notice what happens. You may notice body sensations, a thought, an urge, an emotion, energy, tension, relief, or nothing clear yet.
4. Write or draw what you notice.
5. Now imagine saying no to that same option.
6. Again, notice what happens.
7. Repeat with a few simple choices if you want.
8. If your response is mixed or unclear, write that down too.

Reflection

- What did I notice?
- Was it easier to notice yes, no, or neither?
- Did I notice body signals, thoughts, urges, emotions, or sensory preferences?
- Do I usually listen to these signals or override them?
- What makes it hard to trust myself?

- What helps me hear myself more clearly?

Activity 7: Reclaiming Choice

There may have been times in your life when choice was limited, unsafe, or taken from you. When that happens, it can be hard to believe you have choices now. Self-trust often grows through small acts of noticing, naming, and choosing.

This final reflection is about honoring where you did not have room and noticing where room exists now.

Why this may help

Trauma can narrow attention around survival and reduce a sense of agency. Reconnecting with present-day choice, even in small ways, can support recovery, self-efficacy, and a more coherent sense of self.

Materials

- Paper or workbook page
- Pen or pencil

Optional materials

- Sticky notes for small choices
- Journal
- Colored pens

Access and adaptations

- Make a list
- Use voice notes
- Use bullet points
- Use one word answers
- Do only one question
- Keep this small.
 - resting instead of pushing
 - using a script
 - changing the lighting
 - declining an invitation
 - asking for more time
 - wearing what feels good
 - choosing sensory comfort
 - saying “I’m not ready”

Reflection

- Where in my life did I feel like I had no choice?
- Where do I have more choice now?
- Where do I want to trust myself more?
- What would it look like to believe my voice matters?
- What is one small choice I can make this week that feels true to me?
- What support would help that choice feel safer?

References & Further Reading

This workbook is informed by research and clinical work in trauma therapy, self-compassion, narrative psychology, expressive arts, and neurodivergent-affirming mental health. These activities are for self-reflection and learning, and are not a substitute for therapy, but they are based on approaches that may support emotional regulation, self-understanding, and rebuilding self-trust.

Understanding Trauma, the Nervous System, and Why You React the Way You Do

These resources help explain why your reactions make sense, even if they feel confusing.

- **The Deepest Well — Nadine Burke Harris**
Explains how early experiences shape our stress response, emotions, and health.
- **Nurturing Resilience — Kathy Kain & Stephen Terrell**
A gentle, body-based understanding of trauma and how healing happens through safety.
- **Unlocking the Emotional Brain — Bruce Ecker, Robin Ticic & Laurel Hulley**
Helps explain why lasting change happens when emotional memories shift.
- **My Grandmother's Hands — Resmaa Menakem**
Helps explain how stress and trauma can live in the body, and how feeling safer in your nervous system can make it easier to trust yourself again.
- **How We Learn to Be Brave — Mariann Edgar Budde**
Reflections on courage, identity, and learning to live in alignment with yourself.

Neurodivergence, Masking, and Learning to Trust Your Needs

These resources can help you understand why you may have learned to ignore your instincts, push past your limits, or feel like you have to perform to belong.

- **Unmasking Autism — Devon Price**
About masking, authenticity, and learning to live as your real self.
- **Divergent Mind — Jenara Nerenberg**
Explores sensitivity, neurodivergence, and why many people feel different from others.
- **Laziness Does Not Exist — Devon Price**
Challenges the belief that your worth depends on productivity.
- **NeuroWild — neurodiversity-affirming education**
Helpful resources about nervous system regulation, overwhelm, and autistic experience.
- **Kristy Forbes — PDA & nervous system resources**
Supportive work on demand avoidance, overwhelm, and learning to feel safe instead of forced.

Identity, Belonging, and Reclaiming Your Voice

These resources explore how identity, relationships, and lived experiences can affect self-trust, shame, and the ability to feel safe being yourself.

- **The Body Is Not an Apology — Sonya Renee Taylor**
Healing shame and learning to live in your body with compassion.
- **Polysecure — Jessica Fern**
Understanding attachment, safety, and how relationships affect self-trust.
- **Beyond the Gender Binary — Alok Vaid-Menon**
A powerful exploration of identity, authenticity, and belonging.
- **Decolonizing Trauma Work — Renee Linklater**
Understanding trauma through cultural, historical, and community perspectives.
- **How We Show Up — Mia Birdsong**
Rethinking belonging, support, and what it means to be human together.

Closing Note

Self-trust is not something you either have or don't have. It often grows slowly as your body feels safer, your experiences make more sense, and more parts of you are allowed to exist without fear or shame.

You do not need to read everything. Choose what feels supportive, interesting, or validating right now.