

Leaving the Fold

A guide for
former
fundamentalists
and others
leaving their
religion

Workbook

Foreword by
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Exercise II: Impact Inventory

The issues involved in religious recovery vary from person to person and change over time, depending on the course of the individual journey. The following checklist gives you an opportunity to identify the issues that apply to you now and to think about how much each affects you. This exercise can help you to begin some self-reflection. After you finish this book and have made progress in the recovery process, it should be interesting for you to complete this inventory again and see how your responses have changed.

Directions: For each item, mark the number that best reflects the impact that issue or feeling has on your daily life. For example, mark 1 if the issue is mildly bothersome to you, 3 if it is moderately troubling, and 5 if it is severely disturbing. Mark 2 or 4 if the issue falls somewhere between.

ISSUE	SEVERITY				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Confusion	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Anxiety or Fear	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Lack of clear identity and personal values	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Negative sense of self	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Emptiness, as if you have no core	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6 Negative image of your body and discomfort with sexuality	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Lack of meaning or purpose in life	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. Anger and bitterness	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. Loneliness	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Loss and Grief	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. Depression	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. Persistent Guilt	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. Difficulty enjoying daily pleasures	<input type="checkbox"/>				
14. Unreasonably high expectations, perfectionism	<input type="checkbox"/>				
15. Trouble appreciating people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
16. Difficulty with self-responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>				
17. Lack of deep self-love and skills for self-care	<input type="checkbox"/>				
18. Trouble thinking for yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>				
19. Difficulty feeling and expressing emotion	<input type="checkbox"/>				
20. External focus for satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Exercise 3.1: Motivational Inventory

The motivations for religious involvement described above constitute only a general list. Social pressures vary in strength, and any given person's motivation will be stronger in some areas than in others. I have worked with individuals who had had a permissive upbringing and a wild adolescence who then became attracted to the controlling aspects of Christianity. Others felt a strong need for the emotional comfort and sense of belonging. Still others enjoyed the aspect of cosmic purpose and intellectual tidiness. The following checklist is an aid to making an inventory of your own individual reasons for having become involved in your religion. If you were raised in it, think about why you stayed in and what it did for you at the time. Begin by reading the following statements and rating how important each benefit was in your religious life. That is, rate each benefit according to how important it was in satisfying pressures, meeting your needs, or fulfilling your desires.

Directions: For each item, mark the number that best reflects the attraction that aspect of your faith had for you. For example, mark 1 if the benefit was mildly important to you, 3 if it was moderately important, and 5 if it was very important. Mark 2 or 4 if the benefit falls somewhere in between.

BENEFIT	IMPORTANCE				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Approval from my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Approval from society	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Salvation from eternal death	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Safety in this life	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Protection from myself	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Guidance for my life decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Ethical and moral structure	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. Emotional intimacy with God	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. Sense of belonging in God's family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Community and cultural identification	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. Sense of meaning and purpose in life	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. Stimulation and drama	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. Self-acceptance and self-importance	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Exercise 3.I: Motivational Inventory (page 2)

- | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 15. Participation in a social cause | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Victory over the world and life | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Personal power to be happy and good | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Writing exercise: Now take the insights you gained by working through the checklist and write about this part of your life. Try to write this as a compassionate, non-judgmental autobiography. You could make it an essay entitled "What I Have Liked About My Religion," written from a child's simple, honest viewpoint.

Don't feel you have to do this all in one sitting. You can continue working on it for days or weeks, adding to it as you gain new insights from reading this book and thinking about the implications of what you have learned.

Exercise 3.2: Meeting Current Needs

Basic human needs are natural. As you inventoried your motivations for religious involvement, you probably became more clear about your current needs as well as you past ones. Your strongest needs now may be different from those in the past. For example, you may have felt a strong need for guidance on ethics and morals in the past, which has now waned, but you find community to be of continuing importance. Your need for approval from family may have declined greatly and shifted instead to a greater need for approval from yourself. For this exercise, go back to the Benefits Checklist and, using a different method of marking, rate each benefit in terms of how important it is for meeting your needs now.

Directions: For each item, mark the number that best reflects the attraction that aspect of your faith has for you. For example, mark 1 if the benefit is mildly important to you, 3 if it is moderately important, and 5 if it is very important. Mark 2 or 4 if the benefit falls somewhere in between.

BENEFIT	IMPORTANCE				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Approval from my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Approval from society	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Salvation from eternal death	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Safety in this life	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Protection from myself	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Guidance for my life decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Ethical and moral structure	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. Emotional intimacy with God	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. Sense of belonging in God's family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Community and cultural identification	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. Sense of meaning and purpose in life	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. Stimulation and drama	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. Self-acceptance and self-importance	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Exercise 3.2: Meeting Current Needs (page 2)

- | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14. Mystical, spiritual experience | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Participation in a social cause | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Victory over the world and life | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Personal power to be happy and good | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Writing exercise: Part of your healing work will be to find new ways of meeting your needs—ways that are more healthy and satisfying for you than your religion was. This will involve taking responsibility for yourself and being creative with new possibilities. At first, this task may seem overwhelming. So for now, choose just a few of the important needs on your list and write down some ideas of new methods for meeting them. For example, if you still have a need for social support, where else might you find it? As you work through this book and continue to grow, you can add your thoughts to this list and begin to take action to meet your current needs.

Exercise 4.1: Manipulations Inventory

To create a "manipulations inventory," begin by working through the following checklist to determine which types of manipulations were most effective on you. You may have felt a strong burden of guilt over Christ's death, for example, but experienced relatively little manipulation in the form of altered states.

Directions: For each item, mark the number that best reflects how powerfully that manipulation affected you. For example, mark 1 if the manipulation was slightly bothersome to you, 3 if it was moderately troubling, and 5 if it was strongly disturbing. Mark 2 or 4 if the manipulation fell somewhere between these feelings.

MANIPULATION	EFFECTIVENESS				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Threat of eternal damnation	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. The fear of isolation and vulnerability	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. The fear of shame for "failing"	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. The feeling of guilt for Christ's death	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. The feeling of being responsible for others	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Guilt about sin and the expectation of perfection	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Experiences of altered states	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. The interpretation placed on my private spiritual experiences	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. Symbols, ritual, and ceremony	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Distrust of my own perceptions and experiences	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. Discrediting the outside world	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. Group pressure	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. The authority of the church and the Bible	<input type="checkbox"/>				
14. The limitation of information	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Exercise 4.1: Manipulations Inventory (page 2)

- | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 15. Techniques of thought stopping | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. The distortion of language | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. The internal logic and apparent answers | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Writing exercise: Now write about the mind control manipulations that you experienced as a believer. Describe the ones that were most powerful for you.

Which were you able to resist?

How do you think these manipulations relate to the particular needs that were met for you in your faith?

Which manipulations are still difficult for you to handle?

Exercise 4.I: Manipulations Inventory (page 3)

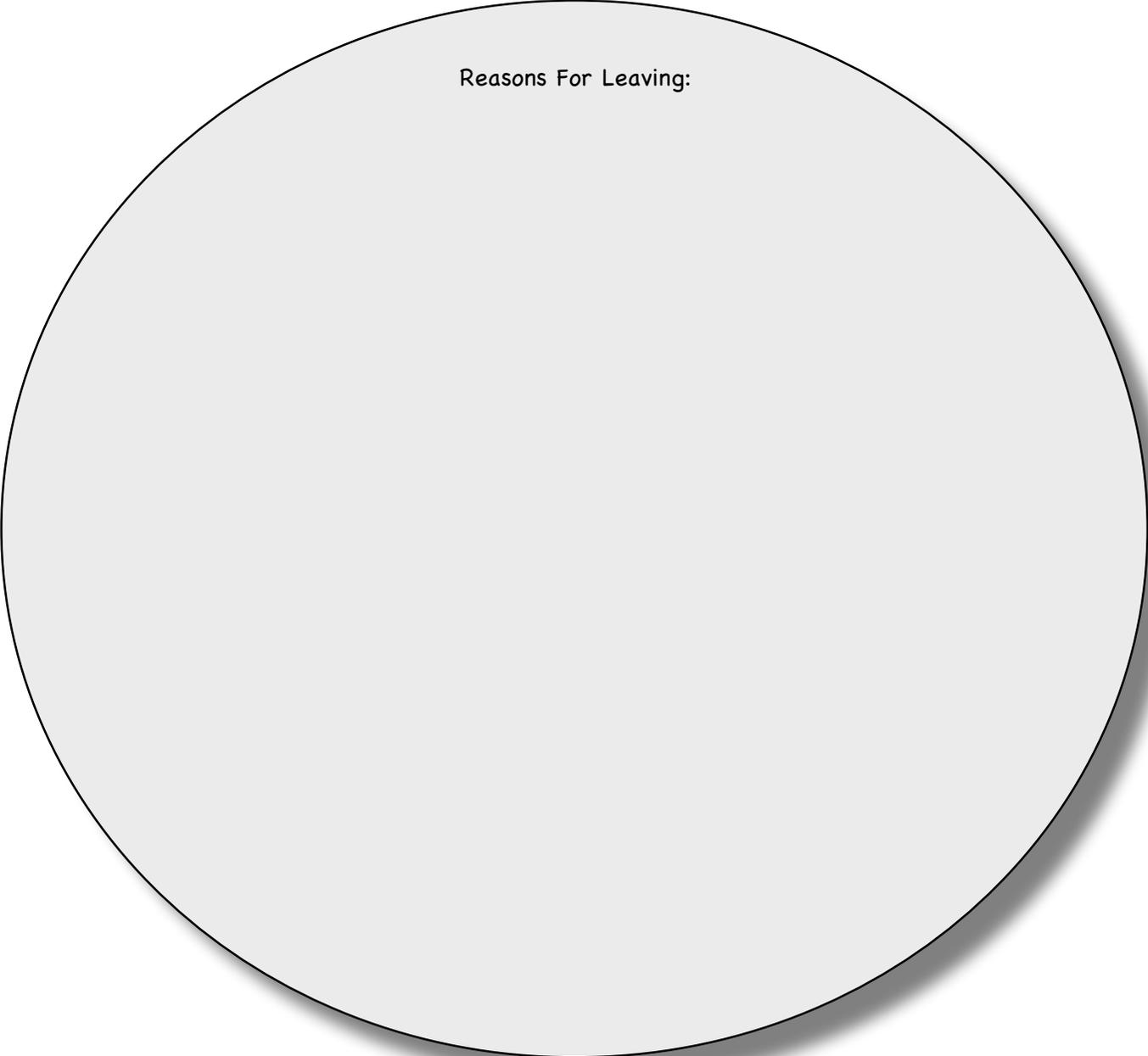
Now imagine going back in time to be with your younger self and privately explaining to this person how you know all about religious manipulations. Imagine your younger self as a person who is doing the best she or he can. From your present vantage point as an older and wiser being, explain the insights that you now have and comfort your younger self about what he or she is going through. Write down what you would say:

Imagine now talking with your inner child in a similar manner, with compassion and understanding. Explain what you think she or he might still be dealing with as leftovers from the manipulations. (You can mention that understanding these things will lessen the impact, and that it's not her fault that there are still leftovers).

Exercise 5.1: Personal Reasons Inventory

Take some time now to review your own reasons for deciding to leave your former religion. You will want to quickly jot down all the things you think contributed to your decision to leave. These could be difficulties with a literal interpretation of the Bible, disappointment with your fellow believers, or simply a sensation of emptiness, that the religion wasn't fulfilling your needs.

Even if your reasons seem not to make logical sense, write them down anyway. When you've written down as many as you can think of right now, go back and read them over. Jot down any others that occur to you.



Reasons For Leaving:

Exercise 5.1: Personal Reasons Inventory (page 2)

Now go back, and for each cause, write a little more about it. Consider the following questions:

1. Was this an issue that you recognized at the time, or is it something that you now understand was a problem?
2. For how long was it a concern to you? Months? Years? Always?
3. How important was it in your making the break? (you might want to number the causes in order of importance.)

It's likely that other causes will occur to you as you read further in this book. You may want to keep an ongoing record or journal of these causes and other aspects of your religious background to help you in the process of healing and growing.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Exercise 5.2: Strengths Inventory

Review the strengths listed below and identify the ones that describe you, putting them in the boxes provided. You can also name other strengths that come to mind. Write about each one, asking yourself:

1. How does this strength describe me more specifically?
2. How has it helped me in my present life?
3. In what way can I appreciate and build upon this strength?

Potential strengths:

- Sense of the profound
- Vision of the possible
- Understanding of gentleness
- Awareness of mercy
- Capacity for humility and trust
- Understanding of gratitude
- Awareness of nonmaterial reality
- Moral development
- Skills
- Community experience
- Healthy skepticism

Strength:

Strength:

Exercise 5.2: Strengths Inventory (page 2)

Strength:

Strength:

Strength:

Strength:

Exercise 6.1: Assessing Family Functioning

If you had a fundamentalist or another authoritarian family upbringing, it is likely that you experienced at least some of the family problems described in this chapter. Since individual families vary, you can gain clarity on your own experience by reviewing the following list of characteristics and assessing the functioning of your family.

Directions: For each item, mark the number that best reflects the extent to which the statement reflects the truth of your family life as a child. For example, mark 1 if the statement is untrue, 2, 3, or 4 if it is somewhat true; and 5 if it describes your family "to a T."

CHARACTERISTIC	SEVERITY				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. My family attended church without fail	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. My parents' beliefs coincided with what I learned at church	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Shame was used as a form of discipline in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Feelings were devalued or ignored in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. A "higher purpose" was emphasized in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. My parents avoided the responsibility of meeting my emotional needs	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Control was a high priority in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. Independent thought was stifled in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. My parents' behavior contradicted their beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Denial and an underlying fantasy were important in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. Physical abuse occurred in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. Sexual abuse occurred in my family	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Exercise 6.2: Recalling the Past

Using what you have learned about your family's functioning from the checklist and the chart comparing functional and dysfunctional family characteristics (as well as the other reading in this chapter), write about your own experience of growing up.

Use the following as a guide for your writing:

- Did your parents show affection openly?
- Did they listen when you expressed concerns or explored new ideas?
- Did they teach you how to handle conflict?
- Did they foster a sense of self-esteem?
- Were any of these things controlled or swept under the rug?
- Which do you think was more important in your family, tolerance or judgment?
- In retrospect, do you think your parents' view of the family was realistic or a fantasy created in order to keep the family together?

Take your time with this. Take each element of the chart and each statement on the checklist in turn, and write as much as you can about that aspect of your family. This process may be somewhat difficult and perhaps painful as you remember old wounds and resentments and begin to realize some of the ways your family fell short of the ideal. The goal here is to try to remember and re-create what it was like for you as a child, growing up in your family. Remember that becoming more aware of this will aid your healing. It is not a matter of blame.

Exercise 7.1: Innocent Child Visualization

Visualization is a technique for drawing upon your unconscious mind for healing and change. The mind processes a great deal of information in nonverbal ways, which though unconscious are nonetheless quite powerful. Imagery has been called the language of the unconscious. Visualization uses that language to enable the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind to communicate. Visualization exercises are used here and elsewhere in this book to work on deeply lodged ideas and feelings. The idea is to use carefully designed visualizations to redirect the power of your imagination—to “reprogram” your unconscious. Otherwise, if you do nothing, you could re-main locked into past assumptions. Visualization that is creative and healing is most likely to occur when you are relaxed. Just as your body is wise enough to digest food and heal itself, the mind is self-healing when it is relatively free from stress and rigid control. In order to get maximum benefit from guided visualizations then, it is important to begin with relaxation. Yet you probably recall serious reservations in fundamentalism about relaxing mental controls. The parable of seven demons moving in to inhabit the freshly cleaned house was used as an argument against having a relaxed or open mind. Thus, your first challenge with these exercises will be to assume positive things about your basic nature and have faith in your mental processes. It's really okay to relax. The purpose of this first visualization is to find your inner child and make a loving contact. You might also learn something about your child or even learn from your child.

As you do this exercise, be open to visualizing your present inner child, that is, the image of the child within you now. This is not the same as the historical child you once were, so you may or may not look, feel, or act the same as you did then. First read over the following script carefully, so that you understand the procedure. Then, speaking slowly, record it on a tape. When you are relaxed and ready to do the visualization, be sure to listen to it with your eyes closed and give yourself enough time for each part, pausing the tape as needed.

Begin by finding a comfortable position for your body and gently settling down. Then close your eyes...take several long, deep breaths, allowing yourself to release tension each time you exhale...inhale...relax...inhale...relax...inhale...relax...letting the relaxation extend to your fingertips and toes, letting go completely...opening up...feeling more safe and secure as your body relaxes even more...And as your body relaxes, your spirit can relax as well, following the wisdom in your body. Your body is very wise, and your emotions can follow...letting your mind take this time to rest...plenty of time...no need to do anything...nothing to figure out...This is

Exercise 7.1: Innocent Child Visualization (page 2)

time for you...a special time to give to yourself...no hurry...breathing deeply, settling down even more...feeling good. Let your mind drift...and gradually, you find yourself in a beautiful meadow...grass...flowers...trees around the edges...The weather is pleasant...you can hear the breeze gently in the grass and trees...you can feel the air on your skin...so comfortable and cool...The birds fly about chirping and singing, resting on branches of trees...a rabbit scampers by, playfully joining others in the bushes...squirrels and chipmunks explore curiously...and a lizard basks in the sun on a rock...You take your time observing the life in this beautiful place, natural and perfect...The plants are growing perfectly in rhythm with the seasons...the water in a nearby stream makes a steady musical sound...the animals play and find food, and care for their young...all at a natural, easy pace...And you find yourself feeling very good here, at home...you are part of nature too...you touch the ground...you breathe in the fresh air...you notice the colors...you feel the textures...You move around...belonging here...this earth is your home too...and you begin to understand...at a very deep level...what it means to live...to just be...in the present...letting go of concern...feeling content in nature...the cycle of the seasons...the natural changes...the beauty of growth. And as you let yourself join this meadow, you notice, not far away, a small child playing in the meadow...And you realize, as you look, that this child is you...as natural and innocent as the other living creatures in this place...And you watch quietly, appreciating and learning...this child is your essence...your inner self. Take your time...let your heart be open...and when you are ready, you can approach your child and be together...in any way that you choose...letting your child be comfortable...talking perhaps...getting acquainted...or just being together...doing whatever feels right...holding...or playing...sharing...this is your time...you can lie in the grass...run through the flowers...climb a tree...watch the birds...play with the squirrels...You belong here and you can enjoy life...When you feel finished for now, you can gradually bring yourself back to this time and place...bringing your child back with you in your heart...and agreeing to meet again like this...to continue learning...and growing closer...opening up and enjoying life more and more...as you count backward from 5...you can return here and be alert...feeling refreshed and rested from taking this time to care for yourself...5...4...taking a deep breath...3...moving a bit...2...getting ready to sit up and open your eyes...and 1, returning.

Exercise 7.2: Using Childhood Photos

If you have them, take another look at pictures from your childhood – yourself, family, friends, activities. You may want to get more pictures from family members. Looking at these can help you reconstruct more of your past and gain empathy for your inner child in the present. While your inner child is not exactly the same as your historical child, he or she may share some things in common, and you can learn something about how to take care of yourself. When you look at the photos, notice the expressions on your face and the faces of others. What do you notice about the way people are relating to each other? What activities are going on? As an objective observer, what would you surmise about this child's life?

If you have a picture of yourself that you like, post it somewhere you will see it often—on a mirror, refrigerator, dresser top. This can help you remember to be aware of your present inner child. Carrying the picture where you'll see it when you open your wallet also works.

I often ask my clients to bring in old pictures or photo albums. We look at them together to get a better sense of the child's life, both then and now.

Dan noticed that in family pictures, he was always the one looking very solemn. It matched his memories of sadness and withdrawal as the family scapegoat and his struggle with a judgmental, dogmatic father. He was surprised to see his isolation so clearly: "There is a picture of me when I was very young. I'm standing alone out in a vacant lot looking at some weeds. I know that someone had to take that picture, but still it stands for my childhood emotionally. As far back as I can remember, I have "been making it on my own."

Monica found an attractive picture of herself at age three, and then saw the same little girl in her visualization of her inner child. The photo helped with the visualization exercise. Making contact with Little Monica felt like a reunion. I could just see that three-year-old there in the meadow. She was sitting on my lap and we had our arms around each other—just that picture of that three-year-old and that cute smile. You know, I looked real happy in the picture; that three-year-old was real happy.

Exercise 7.3: Other Ideas

Here are a few suggestions for other ways of getting acquainted with your inner child

Nature Walk:

Take a walk by yourself in a natural setting that you enjoy. Let yourself relax and be childlike, experiencing all your senses. Be in the environment, feeling a part of it, enjoying your basic unity with the rest of nature, let your feet be connected to the earth. As you walk, use your imagination. If you like, you can stand and imagine yourself as a tree and feel your roots going deep into the earth. You can lie on your back and feel your whole body turning with the earth. As you look up at the sky and clouds, let your vision extend into space. Touch everything around you—soil, rocks, water, plants—enjoy the feeling of connectedness. You have time, you belong here, this is home.

Time with Children:

As adults, we forget what children are like. It gets hard to remember what we did as children and hard to imagine the way children think. A very pleasant way to refresh your memory is to spend time with small children. Even if you have children of your own, it is helpful to visit with other children. Many schools and preschools welcome volunteers. The kids themselves will surprise you with their welcome! Just be sure to play with them. Don't go in solely trying to teach them something. They can teach you a lot if you listen and observe. There are many ways to have contact with children—use your creativity and carve out the time! You'll be glad you did. This is a powerful way to build empathy for your inner child.

Parenting:

If you have a child you have a perfect opportunity to pay attention to the nurturing process. As you hold and love your real child, you can vicariously experience the caring yourself. Megan expressed this well: Having a child was a crucial part of my recovery. I was emotionally very close to Nathan. Being involved with him was an opportunity for me to look again at all those issues that had come up when I was a child and redefine them. By loving him, caring about him, I was able to prove to myself that yes, in fact, I have been a special child and that I deserved to be loved and cared about that way. I wasn't a shameful creature. I really deserved that and I hadn't gotten it. But it wasn't my fault. And I redeemed all of that by being able to provide it for another human being. That's wonderful to find in yourself, within your spirit—the strength and the wisdom to provide for another person. To me, that was the most spiritual experience. I think parenting is always an opportunity to take care of yourself. I was finally able to use that part of me, the part that was a good mother to Nathan, to finally substitute for the parents that I have. That was real important. That person is still there. I can go back and still find that person. There are some nights when I do—when I realize I need my “mom,” you know.

Exercise 7.4: Acknowledging the Injury

Write about your religious training from the perspective of your inner child. You can begin by free associating and taking down brief notes about all your miscellaneous memories. Then write about the damage that your child carries from this experience. Take your time, and be as detailed as possible. These are the wounds you need to recognize in order to be healed.

When you are finished, imagine holding and comforting your inner child.

Exercise 7.5: Consulting an Inner Advisor

Caring for your inner child makes intuitive sense. As you will learn more about in the next chapter, self-nurturing is critical to your growth and well being. However, sometimes it can be very difficult to be the grown-up. If you are having a really bad day, you might feel very small and vulnerable and dearly wish to receive some nurturance. That is, you identify more with your inner child than with your adult self, and—no matter how much you might want to—you can't seem to force yourself to feel strong enough to turn around and take care of your child.

At such a time, a different strategy works beautifully. You simply turn the process around and do your self-care from the other direction. That is, you let yourself be the child. In addition, you imagine another part of you that is a very wise and compassionate being. This is your "inner advisor," a symbol of your deep inner resources. Because your mind understands imagery, you can get support from the wisest and most loving friend that you could possibly have—yourself.

As you did for the earlier visualization exercise, read over this script carefully and speaking then in a slow, steady voice, record it. Because the words are directed to your inner child, speak gently and lovingly, as though to a needy child.

Let yourself get comfortable and gently close your eyes. As you relax, take some nice deep breaths, gradually letting go of everything around you so you can go inside...This is a special time...there's no hurry...Just relax and breathe. As you feel more settled, you can let your mind take you on an imaginary journey...to a personal place outdoors...A place that you like...a place that feels good to you...Let it be a place where you can be alone and comfortable...Where you feel safe...For a few minutes, take your time to enjoy this place...walking around if you like...enjoying what you see and feel...noticing any sounds or smells...breathing and relaxing...

When you are ready, settle in a comfortable place and get ready for a nice surprise. Pretty soon you will meet someone who will be a very special friend to you. It will be a person or an animal, or you might even see a light. This special friend knows you very well already and cares about you very much. You can call this being your inner advisor, because he or she will be able to give you wise advice about anything you like. Your advisor will also be very loving to you and can help you feel better.

When you feel ready to meet your inner advisor, you will gradually notice that you are not alone...Look around and see who it is that has come to be with

Exercise 7.5: Consulting an Inner Advisor (page 2)

you...It could be someone walking toward you...or maybe sitting down beside you...You feel good because this special friend is here to help you.

When your advisor has arrived, take whatever time you want to get acquainted...You can talk about your feelings if you want...You can get a hug...Or you can ask a question...Take all the time you need for this...and enjoy this time together.

Your inner advisor is strong and wise and caring. After you have taken this time, you will feel stronger, and happier, more peaceful and sure of yourself, ready to continue your day. It's also good to know that your inner advisor is someone you can get to know and have for a friend in the future...So take your time to talk and get to know each other...Be sure to ask for anything you need today...And when you feel finished, thank your advisor for helping you, and plan to visit again sometime...Take a nice deep breath...and let yourself come back to your present time and place, opening your eyes and feeling refreshed.

Exercise 8.1: Staying in Touch

At the beginning of each day, take ten minutes to check in with your child. Close your eyes and imagine being together in a comfortable place. Find out how your child is feeling and what might be needed. Talk with your child about the coming day, the love you feel, and what care you will provide. Promise to check in periodically during the day and stay close.

Keep a small notebook with you to record each time you attend to your child. Roughly translated, this means checking in with your own feelings. Make an entry in your notebook, indicating the time of day, the circumstances, how you are feeling, and your best guess as to the reason for that feeling. Try to make at least three observations during the day, and aim for as many as ten. This will greatly enhance your awareness of yourself, and give your child a wonderful sense of being cared for.

Here is an example:

Monday

8:30—Just woke up, angry, dreamt about arguing with Dad.

9:30—Driving to work, felt anxious, late again to a meeting.

12:00—Lunch with Cindy, felt happy, so nice to see her again

3:00—Talking with boss, felt excited, received a new assignment.

6:00—Finishing up paperwork, tired, long day.

8:00—Watching TV, bored, not having much fun.

If you find it difficult to identify your feelings, try copying the following list into your notebook. Then you can refer to it later, for example, at times you might get a vaguely negative feeling but aren't clear about what is going on. In that case, let your inner child help you pick a feeling from the list.

<i>Angry</i>	<i>Sad</i>	<i>Frustrated</i>
<i>Anxious</i>	<i>Happy</i>	<i>Confused</i>
<i>Scared</i>	<i>Hurt</i>	<i>Excited</i>
<i>Stressed</i>	<i>Tired</i>	<i>Disappointed</i>

You may also want to skip ahead to Chapter 10 to learn more about identifying and experiencing feelings.

Exercise 8.I: Staying in Touch (page 2)

Other Techniques

Creating New Images:

Anything you can do to make your child more real to you will help. Without trying to be an artist, one way is to create a picture of your child. Include the environment that your child chooses as a safe and comfortable place, and depict the things that your child tells you are important. Simply listen to what your child cares about and what your child is trying to tell you about how to live. Then express these messages in a way that feels comfortable to you, whether that's two-dimensionally in a drawing, painting, or collage or three-dimensionally as a sculpture in clay or other media. Many find that it works better to use materials like oil or chalk pastels rather than careful line drawings. Visual symbols can have a powerful impact—consciously and subconsciously. You can create and use new ones to reprogram the assumptions you have held for so long. The point here is to make ideas more concrete and visual so that you can better remember them and feel their impact. Your representations can be abstract—using colors, textures, and shapes to represent the feelings, values, and attitudes your child wants to convey. Pictures cut from magazines and other found objects can also be used. These literal expressions will serve to affirm your relationship with your child and make positive goals more real. Finally, put your creations in places where you will see them, such as on the refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or by the front door, where they can serve as reminders and cues. For instance, I created a collage of photographs of nature and children combined with mirrors to remind me of my natural, innocent child blending with nature. I hung it by my front door so that as I left the house each day, I saw my own face among the other images. It gave me a repeated message to notice my child and feel encouraged about the nature of my essential being.

Using a Doll:

I also recommend buying a doll to represent your inner child. This may seem corny or unnecessary; however, it can be a very powerful tool in helping you feel that your child is real. A doll can be seen and held. You can talk to a doll and use it to get yourself to communicate. In the privacy of your home, you can comfort and rock your child. In times of crisis, this can be very soothing. It's much easier than trying to hug yourself. One client of mine, an executive in his forties, bought a doll that he took with him in his car. The doll sat in

Exercise 8.1: Staying in Touch (page 3)

the passenger seat and gave him a strong daily reminder to stay in tune with his core feelings. The doll's physical presence was useful in helping him make sure he did not leave his child at home when he went to work.

This exercise can be great fun. Go to a toy store that has a wide selection of dolls and look them over. Notice the one that seems to be looking at you or the one that seems to be like you in some way. It does not have to look like you did as a child. It's more important to find one that feels like it represents your inner child now. Incidentally, when you buy the doll, no one will know it's for you! It would probably never occur to them. So you don't need to tell the checkout clerk it's for your niece, but if that will get you to do it, fine!

Writing Letters:

As the adult, write a letter to your child. Share your feelings and your understanding of the situation, past and present; and explain your intentions for the future. Then as the child, write a letter in response. If you use your left hand (or right hand, if you are left-handed), it will feel more like a child trying to write. You can also print in block capitals, in pencil or marker.

Letters

Letter from Big to Little (to your inner child)

Exercise 8.1: Staying in Touch (page 4)

Reply from Little to Big

Exercise 8.2: Adoption Visualization

For real life adoptive parents who want to help a needy child, it is important to understand the background of the child they are adopting. Likewise you can think of yourself as an adoptive parent of your inner child. In doing this, you can deepen your compassion for your child through visualization, by going to your child's prior home and letting your child show you what it was like. You may also want to visit church, school, and homes of other family and friends. It will help build trust between you as you acknowledge the experience and provide a way out.

Record the following visualization, using the male or female pro-noun as appropriate. Then, eyes closed, listen to it, pausing as needed.

Take a few minutes to relax and settle into an inner state of awareness...getting comfortable...letting your eyes gently close...letting go of other concerns...taking this time for yourself...acknowledging the caring that you have for yourself and your healing...feeling good about the self-love that is developing in your life...breathing deeply...letting go...sinking down...inhaling relaxation...exhaling tension...breathing in...and out...in...and out...going deeper inside yourself...where you can have an expanded awareness...and be open to learning...receiving from your own inner wisdom...more healing...and more connection with your inner child. And when you are relaxed, you can find a personal place to be...a place that is comfortable for your inner child...and let yourself go there in your mind...open and receiving...meeting your child there...Take a few minutes to be together...talking or holding...expressing feelings...allowing the trust between you to be there.

(pause)

Then as your child feels safe, you can let him/her then know that you would like to understand him/her more deeply...Invite him/her to take you by the hand and lead you back to the past where he/she can show you the sources of his/her pain. Let your child know that it is perfectly safe, that going back to take a look will not mean reliving the pain; observing it will not make it worse. With you along and holding hands, your child can feel secure and understand that you have a definite purpose in going back—to understand and to take him/her away from there.

Allow your child to create a scene that represents the pain he/she experienced. It may be at home with family members present, at school, or at church. Let the action flow while you watch like an observing spirit in the room. Listen to the words that are said, and notice the things that are done

Exercise 8.2: Adoption Visualization (page 2)

and not done. Observe your child and note the effect this environment has on him/her. Allow the scene to continue long enough to get the information that you want about your child's experience. It may be important to let your child show you more scenes. You can observe as much as he/she wants to show you. For example, he/she may want you to see the way the father treated him/her, and then the way the mother behaved. Your child may also want to express feelings. You can encourage your child to say and do things that were not safe then but are perfectly safe now, such as expressing rage. You can also act as his/her advocate. Speak up and address people in the scene. State what you see happening and how you feel about it. Finally, when you feel finished and your child has had enough, let him/her know how much you understand, that you can feel the pain of what he/she has been through. You then need to tell your child that it is time to go. Gently assure him/her that this situation is finished and that you will both be going to a safe place, where his/her needs will be met. If your child is reluctant to leave and wants to continue trying to resolve old issues, you can empathize with his/her feelings and share his/her grief, while still being firm about the need to move on. Let your child know that he/she has already tried everything and that there is no more time. The past is past; there is no change possible there. Then reassure your child that there is plenty of hope and possibility in the present—with you. Let him/her know what your home will be like to live in, how it will be different. Then take your child with you to your present home and make a place for him/her. Give your child what he/she needs to be comfortable. Imagine actually adopting a child, doing all the things necessary to help a child move into your house and into your life.

Exercise 8.3: Affirmations

Many of children's basic needs are not met (or denied) by the messages they receive from adults, particularly parents. To be emotionally strong and healthy, children need affirmation about who they are and what they can do. These affirmations can be verbal, nonverbal, or implied and be equally strong. Affirmations can build on each other and change in emphasis as a child develops. In a healthy child, these become internalized, so that the child grows up learning to make these same positive assumptions automatically.

If there have been gaps in your development, times when you did not receive important affirmations, your inner child needs to hear them now. Over time, your child will come to believe that the statements are true. The following affirmations are based on developmental theory and are adapted from Pamela Levin's book, *Becoming the Way We Are* (1985), and from J.I. Clarke's book, *Self-Esteem: A Family Affair* (1978). Draw from this list to determine the areas in which your child needs extra support. As you read, imagine these things are being said to you and notice your reactions. Does the affirmation sound unfamiliar or even odd? Does it feel good to hear it? You might feel a sense of relief or perhaps sadness that you haven't heard it said before. Mark those affirmations that trigger a strong response with a plus sign (+). This way you can keep track of the things your child particularly needs to hear from you. Then, after you have read through all the affirmations, read the list again and mark with a check mark any additional affirmations you want to reinforce.

Affirmations from Adult to Child

Being (birth to 6 months):

I'm glad you are alive.

I love you and I care for you willingly.

What you need is important to me.

I'm glad you are you.

You can grow at your own pace.

You can feel all of your feelings.

You belong here.

Doing (6 to 18 months):

I love you when you are active and when you are quiet.

You can do things as many times as you need to.

You can use all of your senses when you explore.

You can explore and experiment, and I will support and protect you.

You can be interested in everything.

Exercise 8.3: Affirmations (page 2)

You can know what you know.

I like to watch you initiate and grow and learn.

Thinking (18 months to 3 years):

You can become separate from me, and I will continue to love you.

It's okay for you to be angry; I won't let you hurt yourself or others.

I'm glad you are starting to think for yourself.

You can think and feel at the same time.

You can know what you need and ask for help.

You can say no and push and test limits as much as you need to.

You can learn to think for yourself, and I will think for myself.

Identity and Power (3 to 6 years):

All of your feelings are okay with me.

You can learn what is pretend and what is real.

You can explore who you are and find out who other people are.

You can try out different roles and ways of being powerful.

You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.

You can find out the results of your behavior.

I love who you are.

Structure (6 to 12 years):

You can think before you say yes or no and learn from your mistakes.

You can trust your intuition to help you decide what to do.

You can find a way of doing things that works for you.

You can learn the rules that help you live with others.

You can learn when and how to disagree.

You can think for yourself and get help instead of staying in distress.

I love you even when we differ; I love growing with you.

Identity, Sexuality, Separation (12 to 19 years):

You can know who you are and learn and practice skills for independence.

You can learn the difference between sex and nurturing and be responsible for your needs and behavior.

You can develop your own interests, relationships, and causes.

You can learn to use old skills in new ways.

You can grow in your maleness/femaleness and still be dependent at times.

Exercise 8.3: Affirmations (page 3)

I look forward to knowing you as an adult.

My love is always with you. I trust you to ask for my support.

Interdependence (adult):

Your needs are important.

You can build and examine your commitments to your values and causes, your roles and your tasks.

You can finish each part of your journey and look forward to the next.

Your love matures and expands.

You can say your hellos and goodbyes to people, roles, dreams, and decisions.

You can be dependent and interdependent.

You can be responsible for your contributions to each of your commitments.

Through the years you can expand your commitments to your own growth, to your family, your friends, your community, and to all mankind.

You can be uniquely yourself and honor the uniqueness of others.

You can be creative, competent, productive, and joyful.

You can trust your inner wisdom.

You are lovable at every age.

You can begin convincing your child of these affirmations by focusing on just a few at a time, perhaps addressing the stages of development one by one. For example, you could concentrate on "being" affirmations for a week, then go on to "doing," and so on. Eventually you would want to review all the new messages you are teaching your child and repeat those you have more difficulty remembering.

The ages indicated in the list represent developmental stages of confidence in who you are and what you can do. As you re-parent your child, as you say these affirmations to your child, you may find it helpful to visualize him or her at these ages.

Affirmations can be used in talking to your child whenever you have contact. One strategy is to begin your day by reading a few affirmations to your child. Then write them on cards and post them around the house or tuck them into your purse or pocket to refer to as needed during the day.

Note that this work is designed to be done in conjunction with disarming your "idea monster," which is the subject of Chapter 9. Without this other component the affirmations may sound hollow, and your idea monster could thus undermine them simply by saying "Yeah, sure." In the same way that you would want to be sensitive every day to a real child in your home, you need to care about your inner child's feelings. If you have already begun a notebook to learn about feelings, you may be developing an awareness of your child's emotional patterns. That is, you may now know of certain situations that provoke anxiety, which times of the day are most difficult to get through, or which particular things bring joy.

Exercise 9.1: Tracking Your Idea Monster

Your best weapon against your idea monster is awareness. If you make a simple little mistake and your idea monster says “That was really stupid. What’s the matter with you?” you will be better equipped to evaluate and handle the attack if you can hear it. Unfortunately, most idea monster talk is so habitual that it occurs without any consciousness on your part. All you notice is that you feel bad.

For this exercise, you can use the same small notebook you used for the “Staying in Touch” (Exercise 8.1). This exercise is similar to that one. Each time you notice any idea monster talk, jot down the day and time, the situation, and the talk itself. Your clue to such talk may only be a negative feeling—you become discouraged, scared, or angry—or have low energy, a headache, or a stomachache. At those times, your task is to simply listen to what is going on in your head. Try to hear what your idea monster is saying to you. If you don’t hear any actual words, think about the feeling you have and guess at what your idea monster talk would sound like if it were in words. This has the powerful effect of bringing such talk out in the open and shining a light of awareness on it.

Carry your notebook around for a week and collect the monster talk. Then look over your notes. Chances are your idea monster has favorite ways of attacking you. There will likely be statements that indicate themes and certain kinds of situations in which you feel most vulnerable. Write down these major themes and these “door-opener” situations. Notice how your monster was “helping” you.

Jane is a woman of forty who lived in a religious commune for many years. As she went through the process of breaking away, her monster attacked and harassed her severely. She recorded the following monster talk:

Wednesday, 8:00 a.m., getting dressed for job interview: “You can’t make it out there in the world. It’s a hard, evil place, and you don’t have what it takes.”

Wednesday, 12:15 p.m., looking at house-share ads: “The commune is where you are safe and people care about you. You’re stupid to leave.”

Thursday, 8:00 p.m., thinking about what I want to do: “You’ve become selfish, and that’s evil. You’ll be punished.”

Friday, 10:00 a.m., called about job, no decision yet: “You don’t have any job skills. No one will hire you at your age.”

Exercise 9.I: Tracking Your Idea Monster (page 2)

Saturday, 2:00 p.m., looked at room, talked to potential housemates: "You tried to leave once before and fell on your face. Don't you remember that? You vowed not to ever do that again."

Sunday, 9:00 p.m., after talking to Robert about leaving: "You're just not spiritual enough; that's your real problem."

Monday, 7:00 a.m., writing about what it will be like not living here anymore: "If you leave the body, you will die."

Monday, 3:00 p.m., talked to counselor about job training: "Life's too confusing. It's too hard and not worth living."

This is what Jane wrote about the patterns she noticed:

My inner child feels very scared, weak and ashamed. Idea monster talk themes have to do with 1) being bad, 2) being inadequate, and 3) the world as an impossibly evil and dangerous place. The door-openers are when I talk about leaving the group, make any plans, or make any contacts for jobs or living arrangements. My idea monster seems to protect me by scaring me into staying put and conforming to what I know.

Once you, like Jane, see your patterns, you can learn to replace your idea monster and truly care for your child.

Exercise 9.2: Rebuttals for the Monster Talk

Once you have identified the kinds of things your idea monster says, the next step is to begin to replace that talk with another kind. As a first step, your adult can intervene and stop the negative thinking. This begins to protect your child in a very important way. However, simply rejecting the automatic negative thoughts leaves a void. So, to truly negate each idea monster statement you need to examine it and replace it with a positive and truthful one. In this way, you take responsibility for the messages communicated to your child. This is a creative, loving, and essential project for your adult.

To begin, take the list you made in the preceding exercise and copy it onto the left side of a large sheet (or sheets) of paper. Then on the right, make a companion list of rebuttals. (See the example of how Jane completed her exercise.) Bear in mind that your new statements are meant for your child to hear, not for your idea monster. Your idea monster is not reasonable and you should not argue with it. Your generic response to your idea monster can be as simple as "No!" "Shut up!" "Back off!" or "Get out of here!" An overt rejection is often helpful.

Some of your rebuttals may not be easy. Your idea monster has for a long time had the job of defining reality. Now your adult is taking over, and it requires effort to provide the clear thinking and support that will be most helpful to your child. If you discover new idea monster statements, write them down and design rebuttals for them as well. People often find that as the adult learns to handle certain issues, the idea monster attacks in other areas. Bear in mind that it takes a while to identify all this negative thinking and replace it completely.

Guidelines for Rebuttal

- Rebuttals must be stated positively. If your idea monster says, "You're weak," you need to respond with something like "I'm strong in many ways," rather than "I'm not weak."
- Rebuttals must be reasonable and believable. If your idea monster says "Life sucks," you can say "Life has both ups and downs. The down times can be tolerated and I can also enjoy many beautiful moments." If you try to reply with a positive global statement such as "Life is wonderful," it may prove too hard to accept and consequently be of little use. The notion of learning is a powerful antidote to expectations of perfection. For example, in response to "You're no good at meeting people," you can say "I'm learning new social skills."
- Rebuttals must be accurate to your rational mind, although not necessarily to your gut. You don't have to believe your rebuttals emotionally just yet. It's enough to state the truth as your adult sees it and then gradually come to feel it as something your child can really believe. For example, if your idea monster has convinced you that your body is ugly, it may take a while to believe the rebuttal "My body is very special to me and beautiful in its own way." Though they start in your head, in time new ideas make their way down to gut level. With some, you'll need to be content for now with a cognitive version. Repeating it often so your child will establish acceptance.

Exercise 9.2: Rebuttals for the Monster Talk (page 2)

- Rebuttals must be accompanied by specific examples. Examples add power to your statement. If your idea monster says, "You've become selfish and uncaring now that you say no to people," you can say "Actually, because I take better care of myself, I am able to be more loving. I do things now out of pleasure instead of guilt. For example, because I did not agree to work overtime the other day, I had the energy and inspiration to write a supportive letter to my friend."

The words that you use in your everyday language are also important. When people say, "I beat myself up" or "I am my own worst enemy," they are talking about their idea monsters. This choice of words is powerful in its implication that you would hurt yourself. Yet you know that you would not do so consciously. At core, you want to survive and with some healthy self-love, you want to thrive. So be careful what you say. If you are struggling, and you reword it as, "My idea monster is beating up on me" (or more accurately "beating up on my child"), you can more easily mobilize the energy of your adult to intervene. You will feel a natural concern for your child and rise to the occasion. Responding like a provoked mama bear can at times be highly appropriate.

Jane wrote the following rebuttals for the idea monster talk she collected:

Idea Monster Voice

1. *You can't make it out there in the world. It's a hard, evil place, and you don't have what it takes.*
2. *The commune is where you are safe and people care about you. You're stupid to leave.*
3. *You've become selfish and that's evil. You'll be punished.*

Adult Voice

1. *That was a long time ago and I have learned a lot since then. Specifically, I now know about my inner child and how I can take care of her.*
2. *I'm learning to define my own spirituality. The other day, it felt wonderful to go for a hike and notice how spiritual I felt out in nature.*
3. *That's nonsense. Religious groups typically use such a threat as a method of mind control. There are millions of people out there that are not in the so-called body that are doing just fine. In fact, I know several people who have left this group and are very happy.*

Exercise 9.2: Rebuttals for the Monster Talk (page 3)

Idea Monster Voice

4. *You don't have any job skills. No one will hire you at your age.*
5. *You tried to leave once before and fell on your face. Don't you remember that? You vowed not to ever do that again*
6. *You're just not spiritual enough, that's your real problem.*
7. *If you leave the "body," you will die.*
8. *Life's too confusing. It's too hard and not worth living.*

Adult Voice

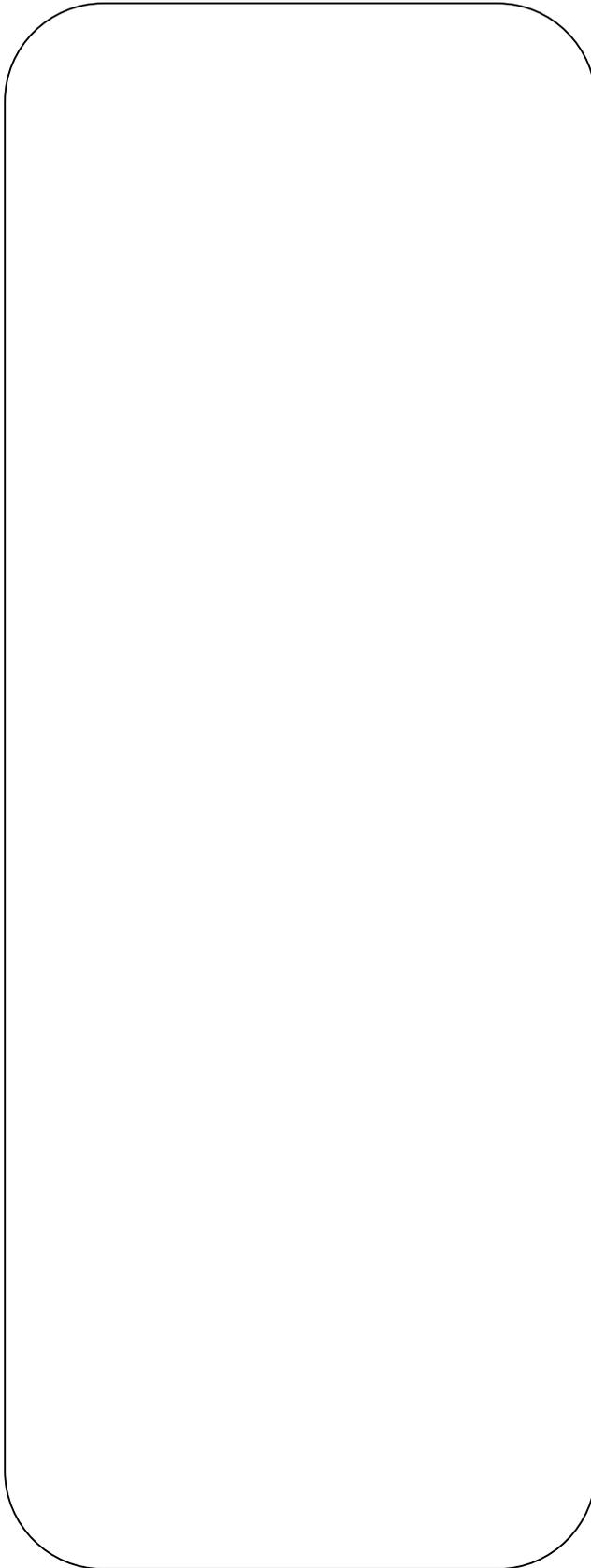
4. *Life is challenging. I'm learning exciting skills for handling difficulties and also finding new meaning. It will take time for me to form new patterns for myself, and it is certainly worth living.*
5. *I have strong inner resources that I am learning to use. The world can be hard at times but I enjoy solving problems. The world is also a wonderful opportunity to grow.*
6. *Other places are also safe, and I can make new friends. I have intelligent reasons for living.*
7. *Taking care of myself is a loving responsible thing to do.*
8. *I have important skills that need to be presented well. I'm getting help from a counselor in writing my resume. Many people return to work at my age.*

In the long run, the list of rebuttals you create will be a set of weapons you can use against an idea monster "attack." When a problem arises, you can draw from the adult statements that you have already worked out. Eventually, you will have a ready set of affirmations that will define reality in a positive way.

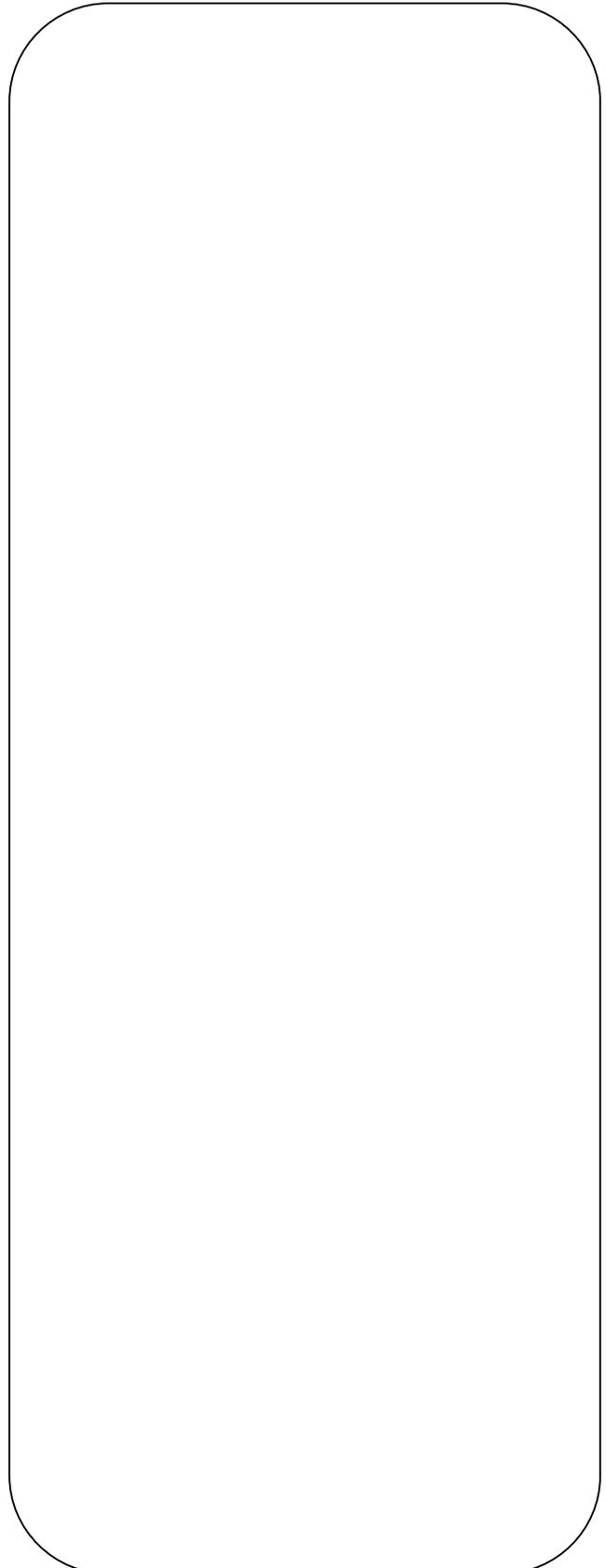
Write some of your adult rebuttals on the following page:

Exercise 9.2: Rebuttals for the Monster Talk (page 4)

Idea Monster Voice

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a rebuttal in the 'Idea Monster Voice'.

Adult Voice

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a rebuttal in the 'Adult Voice'.

Exercise 10.1: Monster Talk About Feelings

Read the following statements and see which ones sound familiar – like something your idea monster says. Check the ones that you recognize and want to change. Then, over the next few days, listen closely to your internal dialogue and pay special attention to times when you feel guilty or helpless. What is your monster saying to you? Try to put it into words and compare it to this list. Add more statements that may be missing here.

Also notice how this increased awareness can begin to disarm you idea monster about feelings. Your inner child deserves to feel!

- Calm down. You shouldn't get so excited
- You're bad for feeling angry.
- A good person feels good all the time.
- It's ungrateful and selfish to feel sad.
- Depression is just self-pity.
- If you were spiritual and close to God, you wouldn't feel bad.
- You're weak and wrong if you feel scared.
- Fear means you're not trusting God, so it's a sin.
- It's wrong to enjoy worldly pleasure.
- Your rage is from Satan.
- Let go, forgive and forget.
- Don't think about how you feel.
- What you feel isn't important.
- If you can't say something pleasant, don't say anything at all.
- Enjoying sex means you are dirty and bad.

Exercise 10.2: New Message to Your Child

To replace the idea monster talk about feelings, your child needs to hear new messages from your adult. One way to do this is to take the idea monsters that you identified in the preceding exercise and write a specific rebuttal for each one. Make two columns on a piece of paper as you did with monster statements in Chapter 9, monster talk on the left and rebuttals to the right. Or use index cards with rejected monster statements on one side and new, positive messages on the other. Keep these with you and review the new ideas whenever you can. Another approach is to write an affirming paragraph to your child. Read it to yourself daily or whenever it's needed. The following paragraph is an example. Use it for ideas, and then write your own, more personal message. It will be more powerful that way.

Dear Child,

It's okay to feel whatever you feel. All of your feelings are fine with me. They are natural and useful. I will work at paying more attention to your feelings, and I will separate out the monster talk. I will accept your feelings and help you feel loved, no matter what you are feeling. I will provide you the support and the guidance you need to use feelings effectively as I learn more about this process. Your feelings are not bad or dangerous. They are beautiful and wonderful. They make you alive and special. I hope you will relax and trust me more and more as together we learn to open up to our feelings.

Exercise 10.3: Practice Feelings

Actual practice in noticing and labeling your feelings can open you up to them. You may be quite surprised at the difference this can make in your daily experience of life.

This exercise builds on one in Chapter 8. Check in with yourself regularly, say every hour (You can use a watch with a beeper to remind you). Each time, jot down a word that best describes what you are experiencing in a small notebook that you carry with you. The emphasis here is on the intensity of and subtle distinctions between different emotions – their shades of gray or tints of color. Listed here is a broad vocabulary to help you pinpoint your feelings. Using more precise words can give you more power to label them and thus to fully experience them.

Joy: light, cheerful, happy, joyful, up, high, pleased, positive, delighted, thrilled, ecstatic, euphoric, overjoyed, exhilarated, enthralled, elated

Interest: stimulated, interested, curious, inquisitive, alert, aware, eager, animated, expectant, hopeful, excited, optimistic, spirited, energized, lively

Satisfaction: contented, satisfied, fulfilled, gratified, satiated, complete, replete

Peace: calm, comfortable, peaceful, tranquil, soothed, mellow, relaxed, at peace, attuned, composed

Confusion: unsure, puzzled, torn, confused, uncertain, ambivalent, undecided, perplexed, disconcerted, conflicted, hesitant, disoriented, baffled, bewildered, lost, crazy

Surprise: amazed, surprised, shocked, appalled, blown away, shattered

Stress: hassled, burdened, fragmented, stressed, torn apart, on edge, testy, overwhelmed, pressured, obligated, caged, trapped, smothered

Play: amused, tickled, playful, silly, childish, childlike, funny, mischievous, devilish, naughty

Freedom: liberated, open, loose, free, uninhibited, creative, alive

Arousal: hungry, thirsty, horny, sexy, attracted, attractive, foxy, alluring, aroused, lustful, desirous, longing, involved, intense, hot, on fire

Indifference: apathetic, unfeeling, unconcerned, alienated, isolated, alone, detached, uninvolved, removed, separated, apart, distant, lethargic, unmotivated, lazy, indifferent

Shame: embarrassed, ridiculous, foolish, ashamed, blamed, guilty, bad, at fault, culpable, wrong

Sadness: disappointed, disillusioned, sad, low, blue, sorrowful, down, depressed, discouraged, lousy, hurt, wounded, dejected, rejected, pessimistic, crushed, upset, miserable, devastated, horrible, grief-stricken

Fear: uneasy, nervous, worried, concerned, troubled, anxious, apprehensive, fearful, timid, shy, disturbed, threatened, scared, frightened, terrified, panicked

Anger: annoyed, irritated, agitated, perturbed, upset, bothered, plagued, frustrated, envious, jealous, exasperated, at wit's end, resentful, unsettled, offended, angry, pissed off, disgusted, bitter, spiteful, steaming, boiling, furious, horrified, hateful, infuriated, enraged

Love: affectionate, warm, kindly, giving, generous, helpful, motherly, fatherly, nurturing, protective, loving, caring, adoring, passionate

Pride: self-satisfied, proud, righteous, superior, strong, virile, powerful, successful, effective, efficacious, in control

Other Suggestions

The following are some additional ways to practice experiencing and expressing you emotions; writing about these in your journal will make them even more effective.

- Watch a movie that arouses some emotion in you. Talk to someone about how it made you feel, or write a few sentences about your reaction.
- Imagine you are someone else – a friend, relative, or acquaintance: Think about how that person feels in a particular situation.
- Listen to the news and observe how you feel about various news items. Use the feelings list from the preceding exercise to be more precise.
- Spend time with a friend who can and does express emotions. Remember a time when you felt annoyed, very angry, disappointed, devastated, nervous, afraid, amused, shocked, elated, confused, disgusted, excited.
- Identify the emotions that are easiest for you to experience. Which are easiest for you to express? Then identify the emotions that are most difficult for you to experience. To express?

Exercise 10.4: Freeze-Frame Practice

On a small card, write down the four A's outlined in Chapter 10. You can describe each one in your own words to help you remember. Carry this card with you and review it periodically. When you feel upset and your child is in need, take out the card and read it to help you cycle through the steps. Afterward, write down what you did in your notebook, using the example of Jan as a model. If, after an emotional episode, you realize you did not use this method, you can still write it out as if you did, and thereby gain awareness about what you could have done. This will help you the next time. Rather than chastising yourself for not using the steps, notice how much you learn by reviewing the situation.

Two other variations can be very helpful. One is to imagine a situation that frequently presents a challenge for you, a door-opener. For example, you may have strong feelings every Sunday morning because you used to go to church. Your idea monster typically harasses your child, and your whole day becomes miserable. However, you can intervene in a general, preventative way by writing out a "prototype" for how you want to respond. That is, you imagine that it is Sunday and you are having some feelings, so you write a description of the situation and the four A's of handling it.

A second similar variation is to write out a "script" just before going into a challenging situation. For example, visiting your parents may evoke strong feelings for you. If you know yourself well enough, you can do a wonderful job of preventative self-care by working through these feelings before they hit. Then it will be much easier when the real event occurs. Writing out this scenario is probably the most powerful way to learn it. However, if you do not like to write, you can also talk it through on tape, or at least think it through in detail. Use your card to help you get each point, making sure you don't skip Acceptance!

Situation:

Intervention:

1. Awareness:

2. Acceptance:

3. Affirmation:

4. Action:

Exercise III: Providing Reassurance

Your indoctrination was deep and primitive and unjust, whether you were a small child or not. An attack of "you're bad and will be punished" on your inner child is an undeserved distortion of reality. It's important to remember that just because you have a feeling does not mean it is based in reality! For example, just because you are ashamed of your body does not mean you have an ugly body. And just because you get scared about going to hell, does not mean you really are damned. So to support your inner child, and relieve anxiety, your adult can make a rational examination of your fear. Write down what it is that you are afraid of. Notice how your child feels and what your idea monster is doing. Let your adult analyze what part of the issue is a real threat and what part can be released. Separate out the idea monster talk and let it go, telling your Little that it simply isn't true, as Jan did in the example in the last chapter. This may have to be done again and again. It may be that you will never completely eradicate the idea that you are doomed. But you can learn to effectively pause and reassure your child each time it comes up. Knowing that this fear is a result of conditioning can help you rise to a higher-order, rational level of processing when it comes up. A variety of other techniques have been developed for working with fear and anxiety. These include visualization, meditation, relaxation, assertiveness, and desensitization. (One excellent source for such exercises is Edmund Bourne's *Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, 1990.)

A selection of approaches are described briefly here:

- ★ Physical health. To achieve more physical relaxation and confidence, it helps to be physically fit. When you feel strong and comfortable with your body, you will feel less threatened. Regular exercise and nutrition are thus important. Some people also report a greater sense of personal security with training in self-defense or martial arts.
- ★ Progressive relaxation. In this technique, you work your way through your body, relaxing each part in turn. Beginning either with your toes or with the top of your head, tense up a muscle and then relax it, noticing the difference in sensation. You can also relax by imagining a white, soothing light moving through each body part in turn, bringing healing and relaxation to every cell. When the light has spread through your whole body, allow it to flow freely, returning to any part that retains any tension and releasing it.
- ★ Massage therapy. Massage promotes physical and emotional relaxation. Since mind and body are interrelated, your feelings will follow the wisdom of your body. That is, instead of talking yourself out of being tense, you can treat the muscular tension and let the emotions follow. This is very helpful when your adult is having trouble mastering the idea monster.

Exercise III: Providing Reassurance

- ★ Guided imagery. Mental imagery is a way of directing your unconscious mind to relax and let go of fears. Close your eyes and go to a safe and pleasant place. Visualize a relaxing scene, such as a peaceful spot in the woods, a warm beach, or floating on a raft on a lake. Use all your senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—to enhance the feeling of really being there. Allow yourself some uninterrupted time in this special place, and stay as long as you need to feel strengthened and nurtured.

Exercise 11.2: Accepting and Expressing Anger

So what do you do with the anger? Begin with accepting it and expressing it in a way that is safe for yourself. This helps to clarify your internal message of "Stop! This situation is not acceptable, and this is why." (You are not judging the anger as unacceptable.) A number of strategies are possible.

- ➔ Write about your feelings. You can write a mock letter in which you express yourself fully. Because you won't be mailing the letter, you can be completely partisan and not even try to understand the other side. You don't need to have complete sentences, use good grammar, or be poetic. You can write to anyone you like—your mother, father, church group, even God. You might want to list all your resentments by beginning a series of statements with "I resent."
- ➔ Imagine saying aloud what you have written or what you are thinking. Close your eyes and picture the person listening to you. You are safe and you have the ability to express yourself fully and without reprisal. You "tell them off" and explain why.
- ➔ Use art therapy. Get some large sheets of paper and crayons, markers, or paint, (or another medium) and use them to express your anger. Without planning ahead what it will look like, simply pick colors that feel right and start in. When you are finished, the piece should have the effect of validating your feeling. It also shows that it's okay to feel; you can express anger without getting out of control.
- ➔ Role-play a conversation. Get together with a trusted friend or your therapist and role-play how you could express your anger to the person whom you feel hurt you. Say everything you want to say. One powerful format is to speak as an advocate for your child. Like an enraged parent, you can ask, "How dare you treat him like that!" Your friend's job is simply to listen and end with an acknowledgment of your feelings.
- ➔ Talk into a tape recorder about your feelings. In the privacy of your own home, you can say whatever you want, free-associating and addressing anyone you like. Verbalizing out loud, will be cathartic and help clarify the issues.

These processes are for you. They build trust between your adult and child by asserting the strength of your self-protective feelings. However, it is important that you do not express everything in this way directly to the individuals concerned. It may be that you will want to express some of these thoughts directly, but this is a different matter. Here we are talking about your internal healing process—your relationship with yourself rather than with others.

Sharon struggled with her feelings of anger toward her father, who had been pious publicly while emotionally abusive at home. She talked her feelings through using a tape

Exercise 11.2: Accepting and Expressing Anger (Page 2)

recorder at a time she was very upset. The imaginary conversation with her father was a healing experience to address her internalized father and work out a better communication for her inner child. She found that the exercise helped her move forward with processing her anger, much like digesting a meal. She was pleased to find that her rage was reduced rather than heightened by this "ranting." The style of her expression is a good example of how to simply get out your thoughts and feelings without worrying about the form.

Thinking about you, Dad. And I feel so much anger and I feel so amorphous, what's it about? A thought came to me today—you didn't give me what was mine—my right to be, my right to be a person. To be honored, respected, cherished, nurtured, adored, like a child deserves. I never got that. And you took it another step by taking things away from me—with criticism, with anger, and ... I don't know, it's so confusing, the desperateness of trying to find a place, the feeling I have of trying to be seen. And how is it that when I'm with family, I feel invisible? There's nothing I can do or say that would make me present, that would make you care, in a real way, in a heartfelt way, in a way that would seem like you were moved, that my existence was real.

Exercise 11.3: Replacing Angry Monster Talk

Ironically, the beliefs you were taught may contribute directly to your anger. You were taught to be helpless and dependent, relying totally on God and the church for everything. Thus it is probably easy to feel like a victim and to blame, rather than taking responsibility for yourself.

Another belief that might now contribute to your anger is the assumption that life is fair, that there is ultimate justice. As an obedient and special child of God, you were entitled to a superior, victorious life, both here and for eternity!

Thoughts like these can exacerbate feelings of anger—thoughts about shoulds, blame, and helplessness. So, in addition to self-nurturing, you will need to clean out your “idea closet” in this area as well. Part of your growth will be to accept life as it is. There are no rules about what should happen to you or anyone else. This may be tough to swallow but it can also be very liberating. Viewing life as a learning experience can help you let go of the notion of fairness and feel some relief from your frustration.

Begin by listing the anger-arousing thoughts that your idea monster feeds to your child. Then examine them one by one and replace them with new ideas from your caring adult. Remember that you don't need to believe your new thoughts on a gut level. You are responsibly creating the attitudes you want to have in your life, and it will take time for them to feel natural and obvious.

Again, note that monster talk is exaggerated and focuses on problems without considering any possibility for change. In contrast, your adult messages can be realistic and accepting of facts. Feelings can be accepted and borne. In addition, your adult does not stop with the past but takes responsibility to make new decisions for the present. The adult offers the child hope, and hope diffuses anger.

Here are some examples:

Monster Talk

New Idea

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. They made you waste a lot of Sundays, and that's horrible. You'll never make up for it. You'll be miserable on Sundays for the rest of your life. | 1. You spent a lot of Sundays in church. How do you want to spend them now? |
| 2. Your friend Jane expresses herself with such confidence. It's not fair. | 2. It's too bad your self-esteem was not encouraged. Let's address it now. |
| 3. You're a mess. You're totally unprepared for life. | 3. You have some valuable strengths because of your faith. Let's figure out what else needs to be learned. |
| 4. You can't dance because you were taught it was a sin. That's terrible. | 4. You can learn to dance now! |

Exercise 11.4: "If I had been there..."

Write a letter to your child explaining in detail what his or her past would have been like if you had been present with your current awareness. That is, imagine the kind of care you would have provided for yourself, given your present understanding. Also let your child know what you know about what happened. Actually going back in time is impossible but this exercise can help work through your grief and build trust between your adult and child. Here's an example:

Dear Little Tom,

I understand that you were convinced you were a bad little boy. You were told to read your Bible and pray every day, and this made you very anxious. When you were good, you got very little comment, and when you were "bad," you got scolded and punished. If I could have been your dad, I would have held you and loved you a lot. I would have told you what a wonderful little boy you are, no matter what you do! I would have encouraged your talents and helped you to appreciate yourself.

I would have given you many things to read and suggested that you think about what you think. Your ideas and feelings would have been very important. I would have wanted you to have fun and be a kid. I would not ask you to worry about the future or about other people. When you got to be a teenager, I would have given you gradual freedoms and encouraged you to talk about your choices and desires.

I would have wanted you to have a lot of experiences and to enjoy life. I wish I could go back and do all this for you. It makes me sad that this was not your experience.

Love,

Big Tom

As you read the letter above and as you write your own letter, you will realize that much of what you missed is within your ability to give to your child now. You can have fun now, you can be social, you can have your own thoughts. Getting these needs met, even though belatedly, can relieve some sadness. Rather than feeling deprived or mistreated, you can make the most of what is possible now. However, some of the damage and lost life is irreplaceable. You cannot be a carefree six-year-old again. Some people attempt to deny the loss. This only underscores the feeling that you don't matter! Rather than neglecting your inner child further, it will be much more healing for you to honestly grieve this loss. It turns out that you *can* handle the sad feelings. You don't need to suppress your grief in order to survive. When your child's feelings have been accepted, you might be surprised to feel grateful and more satisfied, ready to go on with life.

Exercise 11.5: Accepting Loss, Feeling Grief

The personal losses listed above all need to be mourned; it is not helpful to minimize the importance of your loss or to suppress your sad feelings. Out of embarrassment, former believes often say things like, "I'm relieved. I don't miss a thing about it. The only feeling I have is anger about wasting my time." Circumventing grief work only delays the process of healing.

Thus, the usual recommended approach to grieving is to *go through it*. Let yourself experience the depth of your feelings and trust your natural healing processes to take you through to the other side. While doing to, keep these points in mind:

- Your feelings are safe to feel.
- Crying is okay.
- Everything you feel cannot be explained.
- You feelings are not permanent.
- You will not "go crazy."
- You are a good person.
- Time does heal.
- Things will get better.

A number of symptoms can occur during a period of grieving including anxiousness, loss of appetite, digestive problems, insomnia and nightmares, poor concentration, fatigue and weakness, rapid mood changes, lack of contact with your emotions, loneliness, helplessness, depression, lack of interest in sex, anger, guilt, self-criticism, and suicidal feelings. Knowing these symptoms can help you understand and take care of your-self.

One framework for understanding grief work is in terms of the "tasks of mourning." Psychologist J. William Worden (1982) lists these four tasks as follows:

1. To accept the reality of the loss.
2. To experience the pain of grief.
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.
4. To withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it in another relationship (in this case, a loving relationship with yourself)

To accomplish your own tasks of mourning, you might consider the following:

- ★ Talking about your loss with a trusted friend or therapist.
- ★ Writing a goodbye letter to your religion, to God, or to your fantasy.
- ★ Having a "memorial service," in which you honor your experience and then let it go.
- ★ Creating a memorial piece or art or writing.
- ★ Giving yourself a designated time to grieve on a daily basis, during which you can safely "break down" and cry.

Exercise 11.5: Accepting Loss, Feeling Grief

- ★ Expressing your sadness through art and/or writing. Let your child be free with this, letting the writing part be “fingerpainting with words.” Samantha drew pictures and wrote poetry that represented her internal turmoil. In one piece, she created spirals of different colors, representing feelings of sadness, serenity, peace, and joy, all shaded with a gray she said was a spiritual fog, indicating her confusion. At the bottom, the spiral ended in a red tear that was her sadness. A second drawing was large close-up of the tear-shaped sadness, revealing her face inside, with tears coming down. She says she feels trapped in the sadness sometimes and expressing herself helps.

Use this space to express yourself about your loss. This can be drawing or writing or both.

Exercise 12.1: Exploring Your Uniqueness

Ordinarily, a person's "sense of self" comes from awareness and ownership of personal, subjective experience. This requires a respect for your feelings and trust in judgments you make based on these feelings. You understand the unique patterns of your own life, consisting of the hundreds of choices you make daily in the way you think, feel, and behave. This is what makes you who you are. When you leave fundamentalism, you may find that because you have not been free to make your own choices, your personal identity is far from clear.

Like Debbie above, you might need to get to know yourself. A mature human being is like a rich oil painting. The years of experience are like many layers of paint that interact to create the final effect. The process is slow and cumulative, blending and changing, but the changes are neither random nor mysterious. The color combinations produce effects that are tangible. Similarly, the events of your life have combined in understandable ways to bring you to where you are today.

You are a beautifully complex being, rich with detailed layers. Your task in this exercise is to imagine yourself in a room full of people; then describe yourself, non-judgmentally, in a way that would make it impossible for anyone to say, "That's me, too." Write your description in the *third person*, as if you were the main character in a novel. Help the reader appreciate this character as having a unique place in the world. Refer to yourself with your name and "he" or "she." This will help you disengage and describe more easily and with compassion.

Consider the following questions in describing your "protagonist," along with any others you think of or want to explore:

- *Physical description.* Describe not just your height, weight, and age, but how you carry yourself, stand, and sit. What is your facial expression in repose? What do you look like when you're happy? What is your voice like? Your laugh? How do other people respond to you? Do you listen more or talk more? Do you have distinctive habits or gestures or figures of speech that you use often?
- *Mental and emotional makeup.* What is important to you? What do you value? What are your interests? Your dreams? Are you idealistic, realistic, romantic? Do you analyze things or take them as they come? Is truth or compassion more important to you? What do you most enjoy? What are your pet peeves?
- *Your origins.* What has made you who you are? Are there key events or people in your life that have shaped you? Do particular memories resonate for you or have a special significance that you alone are aware of? Does your family's history—where they came from, the kind of work they did, or the lives they led—contribute to the person you are?

Use the space below to describe this person that is you.

Exercise 2.2: Self-Appreciation

Try one or more of the following three ideas for increasing the value you place on yourself.

List *at least fifty things you like about yourself*. This might feel like a challenge, but go ahead and push yourself! If this process feels wrong and egocentric, just notice that discomfort, recognize it as part of the negative training you have had, and continue writing.

For example, your list might begin like this:

1. I am kind.
2. I am a good listener.
3. I love my kids.
4. I have a nice singing voice.
5. I look good in blue.

Keep a simple journal for two weeks or so. Each day write down the positive things you did and the strengths you noticed in yourself. If you are tempted to write about problems, remember that the goal of this exercise is to learn self-appreciation. Problems can be addressed in time. When Lauren wrote the following entries, she realized there was a lot she could be proud of:

Monday

- *Wrote a letter to my sister, enjoyed the process instead of hurrying.*
- *(I'm pretty good at keeping in touch with family.)*
- *Started a novel. (I like that I read a lot.)*
- *Gave my neighbor some vegetables from my garden. (I'm very generous.)*

Tuesday

- *Visited my daughter's classroom and read a book to the kids. I was funny, and they had a good time. (I like my playfulness with kids.)*
- *Invited my daughter's teacher to dinner. (I'm good about staying involved in her education.)*
- *Chatted with the mailman. We're on a first-name basis and talk occasionally. (I like my openness to people and how they trust me.)*

Wednesday

- *Wrote some poetry. It was hard and I'm not very good, but I did it anyway. (I like that I'm interested in learning new things.)*
- *Got a workout at the gym. (I'm good about exercising.)*
- *Paid bills. (I don't mind living modestly.)*

Exercise 12.2: Self-Appreciation

As the days go by, you can enjoy the change in your perception. You may want to continue this exercise for a much longer period, as you learn to love yourself more. If you have practice of keeping a journal, this could be a permanent addition to your writing.

Make a list of all your "faults." Then beside each one write how it has functioned in your life. Thank each "fault" for the way it has helped you survive, for example: Amelia came up with the following list:

- ***Shy about meeting new people:*** *It takes the pressure off to make conversation and I avoid rejection, feel safer*
- ***Compulsive about cleaning:*** *As a child, doing chores well, made me feel needed and appreciated; doing them early and constantly and without being asked was a way to avoid criticism and punishment*
- ***Not good about being active in friendships:*** *By not calling or writing, I don't have to risk feeling unimportant if they don't respond; the friends I do have do all the work and I feel valued.*
- ***Working too hard, being constantly overcommitted:*** *As a child, staying very busy was a good way to avoid noticing the family problems and feeling bad.*
- ***Oversleeping:*** *Staying in bed always made me feel safe and protected, in a private space, away from others.*

Notice the expanded feeling of self-love that this exercise gives. You have embraced your whole self and not just the acceptable parts.

Exercise 12.3: Body Visualization

Find a time and place where you can relax and be undisturbed for about twenty minutes. Record the following guided visualization, speaking slowly, and then replay it with your eyes closed.

Begin by leaning back or lying down in a comfortable position ... breathe deeply several times ... in and out ... in and out ... letting yourself relax with each breath ... letting go of tension each time you exhale ... Take your time to become comfortable and quiet, letting this be a special time for you ... inhale ... exhale ... inhale ... exhale ... and as you breathe, gradually become aware of your body, noticing where you have your arms and hands ... the feeling in your legs and feet ... the sensations in your torso ... the rise and fall of your chest as you breathe ... the way your head feels ... notice how your clothes feel on your body ... feel the air on your skin ... and just let yourself become sensitive to all that you can physically experience in this moment. As you notice these external sensations, also become aware of your internal experiencing ... Let your center of consciousness come down from your head, where you do all your thinking and analyzing, down into your body ... into your torso ... moving around and feeling your inner being ... without examining ... just accepting and noticing ... the beat of your heart ... the breath in your lungs ... the feelings in your belly ... your genitals ... your lower back ... your upper back and shoulders ... gradually letting your awareness move into your limbs ... down your arms and into your hands ... down your legs and into your feet ... just letting yourself be a body ... a wonderful being ... everything working together ... circulation, respiration, digestion, muscles, bones, immune system, nervous system, emotions, thoughts ... creating and continuing life. And as you lie still you can be aware of the energy that is coursing through your body ... the life force ... the life energy that is you ... and you can appreciate this more fully ... letting go of the judgments you have had about your body ... imperfections you have worried about ... just letting them go as you realize the beauty and physical miracle of your being...." And as you continue breathing, imagine going somewhere outdoors where you can be alone ... a place that is pleasant and safe and refreshing to you ... and take a minute to settle there and be aware of your environment ... As you feel comfortable begin to move around, experiencing the movement of your body ... You are alone and in complete privacy ... You can take this time to enjoy yourself in any way you desire ... breathe and relax and move ... You can walk or run, or fly or dance or swim ... You can take your clothes off if you wish ... feeling the sun and breeze more directly ... This is your time to celebrate your body and notice more clearly who you are as a physical being ... you can lie down if you wish ... you can look at yourself ... and you can touch yourself ... Take as much time as you want for this experience, letting a joyous new realization sink down deeply within you ... This is your body ... it's beautiful ... it's wonderful ... it can provide you with great pleasure ... you can love and appreciate yourself in this way ... this is you. When you feel completely finished, take a very deep breath to signal your body to come back to your current time and place ... Sit up and stretch, and bring back with you the feelings of refreshment and new awareness.

Exercise 12.4: Inner-Self Visualization

This exercise is designed to help you notice and appreciate the reality of your inner self. Repeating it frequently will aid in overcoming feelings of emptiness and weakness. Over a period of weeks, the cumulative effect can be quite powerful—certainly worth the investment. Record the following visualization on tape. When you want to use it, find a time and place to be quiet with yourself for fifteen minutes or so. Make yourself physically comfortable, take several deep breaths to relax, and play the tape back.

Let your body slow down and rest, releasing the tension in your muscles as you think about the parts of your body and let go ... taking this time for you ... letting your awareness come down in to your body ... allowing yourself to feel more grounded and centered. As you breathe and relax more deeply, you can gradually become aware of the center of your body ... your chest cavity or solar plexus ... and breathe into that area, beginning to visualize it in your mind ... and becoming aware of yourself there ... an image of your essence ... your inner being ... feeling the presence of your inner self ... noticing aspects ... color, a glow, light, or radiance perhaps ... that is particular to you ... whatever you notice ... movement, flowing, or filling ... or stillness ... temperature ... a warmth or soothing coolness ... any sound ... or texture... any changes ... rhythms ... just allowing yourself to be real ... and feel the intensity of your inner presence ... letting it fill your consciousness ... and fill your body. Take time to appreciate yourself and what you are learning ... take all the time you need to let this awareness sink in, that you have a rich and real inner being, ready and waiting to be more evident in your life ... an immense potential for you to appreciate ... Just breathe and feel ... and enjoy this awareness until you have completed what you want for now. When you are ready, take a deep signal breath and return to the present time and place, letting yourself continue the rest of your day with an enhanced awareness of your inner self. After you finish visualizing, a useful follow-up is to draw some representation of your inner self. Using crayons, chalk, or oil pastels, sketch something simple that feels like you. Post it somewhere to remind you of your inner essence.

Exercise 13.1: Writing a Letter of Welcome

At first you may find it challenging to “make yourself at home.” Shifting to a lifestyle of involvement in the world means a change of very basic assumptions. Your idea monster may have a lot of negative comments to make about living life now. To protect your child and promote cognitive change, watch out for lines like these:

It's wrong to care about the world.
You don't belong here. What a misfit!
Don't bother trying to be happy.
The world is just a rotten place, and too hard to change.
People are stupid and full of pride.
Watch out! New things are dangerous!
If it's fun, it must be wrong.

You can begin to help your inner child feel at home by writing him or her a letter refuting the religious ideas and the monster talk about the world that have been evoked in the past. For example, you might write something like this:

I know that you may feel uncomfortable in the world. That's understandable—you were told that you don't belong here. But I want to tell you now that you do belong here. This is your home. Just like the squirrels and the deer and the birds, you too have a home on this earth. You have a life to live and the right to enjoy your life. You can relax and be present. You don't need to plan for another life or work on other people. You are welcome to make yourself at home by doing whatever you like. You can help yourself to the food that is here and anything else you may need. You don't have to be on your best behavior, but you will need to clean up after yourself and help with the chores. We're all working together to make this world a nice place to live.

In your own words, write a letter of welcome to your child.

Exercise 13.2: Homemaking

As you settle in to making this earth your home, you can brainstorm ideas that would help. Imagine you are a being from outer space who has come to earth. You've decided to stay, and you want to form a comfortable attachment to your new community. You need to learn your way around, become familiar with your surroundings and the other inhabitants, learn the language and its nuances and idioms, make friends, and so on. You might begin by doing the following:

- Find out the names of the plants and animals that live around you.
- Take your time walking around local neighborhoods. Talk with your neighbors, store clerks, waiters, a traffic officer, or someone waiting for a bus. Introduce yourself and find out their names.
- Find a place to volunteer some time to better your community.
- Familiarize yourself with your city council and the issues that are currently being addressed.
- Become involved in a local agency or event.
- Read the local newspaper. Watch local TV news and specials.
- Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, expressing your views on a topic that is important to you.
- Make sure you are registered to vote and participate in elections.
- Choose an environmental issue and find a way to help.
- Talk with a lot of people, especially those who are different from you. Listen carefully as they talk, and try to understand their viewpoints. Get to know your neighbors.
- Go to community events, especially those that involve local residents. Enjoy local celebrations and festivals.

Exercise 13.3: New Responses

Acknowledging your feelings and judgments can go a long way toward diffusing them. One way of doing this in a concrete way is to keep a log of any thoughts you have of fear, disdain, and perfectionism. Writing them down will keep them from becoming exaggerated and overpowering. You can then consciously talk to your child and actually “reprogram” your thinking. For each occasion, write down a new, more life-affirming response to the situation. Over time, this practice will begin to change your reactions to life experiences.

Exercise 3.4: Childlike Fun

Close your eyes and invite your inner child to be with you. Tell your child that you want to create more fun in your life. Explain that you recognize this as a need and that you want your child to be happy. Then invite your inner child to help you think of ideas for having more fun. Spend some time brainstorming the following categories.

- Fun things that you enjoyed when you were little.
- Places you've wanted to visit.
- Books you'd like to read.
- Friends you'd like to see or talk to on the phone.
- New people you'd like to have as friends.
- Movies, plays, concerts.
- A new "toy"
- Enjoyable activities around the house, such as gardening, redecorating, gourmet cooking.
- More and different sports activities.
- More creative sex.
- Arts and crafts.
- A class in something that interests you.
- New restaurants.
- New projects at work.
- Little things like sitting on the porch with a cup of tea, taking a bubble bath, rolling down a hill of grass, walking to work or the store, doing a jigsaw puzzle.

Have fun making a huge list without censoring anything. Include things that are completely new to you and things that seem impractical or even impossible. For example, maybe you can't afford to go on a cruise, but if you put it down, you are more likely to notice a bargain opportunity. And take some chances! While you may not consider yourself an artist, you can still have a ball in a painting class. This is your life and you deserve to enjoy it. Then take a few items from your big list and put them on your calendar. Make plans for following through on each of them. And when you have, check them off. Let yourself have the feeling of accomplishment. You are growing and changing in a very important way, redefining your goals and purposes. When you consider all the little fun things that are possible, you can easily include at least one every day.

Exercise 3.5: Taking Stock

Learning to enjoy life more is an important part of recovery as well as great fun. Another strategy for increasing your pleasure quotient is to simply notice and appreciate more. You can do this by keeping track of what happens and learning to cherish your favorite things. In your notebook, every evening make notes about the three things you most enjoyed that day. At the end of the week, write down the three favorite experiences of your week. Do the same at the end of each month. Soon you will notice how much you can appreciate the positives in your life.

Mark, the father in a family of five, came up with the following notes:

Daily highlights

Friday:

- *Playing a game of slam dunk the tennis ball with my toddler, using the basket on his stroller.*
- *Exploring a new route home from work, through the woods instead of on the freeway. More relaxed, leisurely.*
- *A visit to the bookshop/café; having a fancy coffee. Finding a new book I want to read and a good one for my wife.*

Saturday:

- *Having some quiet in the morning to read the newspaper. Relaxing.*
- *Interesting items. I like keeping up with the events.*
- *Minor league baseball game. Chatting with new friends. Sampling spicy French fries.*

Sunday:

- *Four-mile run down to the beach and back, view of the water; a good workout.*
- *Making love in the afternoon when the kids were out.*
- *Finally talking to my sister on the phone. It's fun to reconnect.*

Highlights for the week:

- *Free outdoor concert with a big band. Friendly folks and neighbors. Dancing some swing even though no one else would. Lots of smiling. Tried to get a new step right.*
- *Making love in the afternoon when the kids were out.*
- *Having some quiet in the morning to read the newspaper.*

Highlights for the month:

- *Finding a replacement for the stereo system.*
- *Seeing my daughter again after six months.*
- *Having a bonfire, marshmallow roast on the beach. Clear skies, bright stars, a satellite passing by. Some wine. Fun and easy.*

A similar approach is, for each of the categories listed below, to write down one or more favorites. This will help you distinguish your preferences more clearly, and thereby intensify your feelings of pleasure. If you do not have any favorites in a particular category, leave it blank for now. Pay some attention over time, gradually identifying more favorites and filling in all the blanks. This is not intended to be judgmental or close off other options. Your choices can change tomorrow. The purpose is to notice and celebrate the details in your life. Have fun! Create other categories if you like.

Color	Junk Food	Dance Company
Fruit	Cologne	Board Game
Vegetable	Beverage	Sport of Game
American dish	Animal	TV show
Foreign dish	Neighbor	Flower
Time of day	Friend	Tree
Scientific discovery	Kitchen utensil	Poem
Part of your body	Room in your house	Painting
Piece of furniture	Article of clothing	Sculpture
Childhood memory	Slang word or phrase	Insect
Season	Novel	Popular song
Foreign country	Nature sound	Classical music
Foreign movie	Smell	
Play	Nonfiction book	
Musical	Houseplant	
Hobby	Magazine	
Pastime	Comedy movie	
Car	Dramatic movie	

Exercise 14.1: It's Okay to Think

With your background, it's natural for your Little to feel afraid, confused, guilty, and inadequate when you try to think through any issue for yourself. But your adult self, your Big, can protect your Little. You can work through the four A's of intervention, as described in Chapters 8 and 9. Your monster may well be making statements such as:

"That's not what you've been taught! You can't think that!"

"Watch out! Those are your own ideas. You can't trust yourself!"

"If it's not in the Bible, it can't be right."

"If you open your mind, anything could come in, including demons."

"Who do you think you are?"

A preventative strategy is to write down your monster talk statements and then devise a specific adult rebuttal for each of them. For instance, if your monster says, "God doesn't want you to think," you might reply with "The God I believe in wants me to act like the intelligent being that I am."

Exercise 14.2: Belief Reconstruction

In this exercise you will complete ten statements that represent your basic assumptions about yourself and your life. First you will clarify the old assumptions you had while you were within your religion. Then you will replace the old assumptions with new statements about what you believe now.

For each sentence "stem," begin by writing down the belief that you used to hold. Then beside it, describe the feelings and behavior that resulted from that belief. On the next line, complete the sentence again, this time expressing your present belief, even if you don't feel completely convinced of it just yet. (These are simply working assumptions you can use to guide your life. They might not *feel* true on a gut level because they are not yet familiar.) Finally, beside each new belief, write down the feelings and behavior that are likely to result from that assumption.

You may also notice that some of these items are difficult to respond to in a new way. The important thing is to provide your inner child with the best wisdom you have, the same way a wise parent shares life knowledge. Rather than simply destroying old beliefs and leaving a vacuum, you give your child new ideas to trust so that he or she doesn't feel confused and abandoned. As you grow and develop, these ideas will evolve. (The exercise that follows, "Opening Your Mind," can help you develop new ideas, if you are having trouble). Be patient, and realize that it will require *effort* for your adult to provide this for your child. You can feel good about taking this step of self-responsibility.

Belief Statements

1. I am...
2. Life is...
3. The world is...
4. Other people are...
5. My feelings are...
6. The future is...
7. The present is...
8. My purpose in life is...
9. My biggest hope is...
10. My greatest fear is...

As an example, here is the way Deborah completed the beginning of this exercise:

Exercise 14.2: Belief Reconstruction

Belief Statements

1. (Old) *I am only valid as a part of God – nothing without Him.*
1. (New) *I am a valuable individual, unique and creative and lovable.*
2. (Old) *Life is learning to be more Christlike.*
2. (New) *Life is an adventure with limitless possibilities.*
3. (Old) *The world is sinful and fallen and needs redemption.*
3. (New) *The world is basically a good place to live and can be trusted to support me.*
4. (Old) *Other people are weak and need my help.*
4. (New) *Other people are free to learn, make their own choices, and find their own power.*
5. (Old) *My feelings are unjustified.*
5. (New) *My feelings are justified and important.*
6. (Old) *The future is doing God's will.*
6. (New) *The future is anything I want it to be.*

Feelings and Behavior

- No sense of individuality – I don't know what my own thoughts and feelings are.*
- I feel okay about my own thoughts and feelings. More relaxed: it's alright to just be me.*
- Guilt with failure. Pressure to be perfect. Emphasis on doing things right.*
- Acceptance of myself. Mistakes are a learning experience.*
- I don't trust the world. I am fearful of being swayed by anything "out there" that might taint me and be of Satan since the world is his playground.*
- I don't always see bad around the corner. This lets me relax and let good experiences happen to me.*
- Tremendous feelings of responsibility. I always put others first and there's nothing left.*
- A weight is lifted. I can accept others and encourage them to find strength within themselves.*
- Guilt: burying them and trying not to acknowledge them.*
- Joy and self-love. Examining feelings and listening to what they are trying to tell me. More sharing and deeper relationships.*
- Anxiety at not knowing God's will. Fear that precious days and moments are passing me by. No point in making plans or having goals.*
- Joy and anticipation. Realistic fantasy of the possibilities. Setting goals and courses of action to achieve what I want.*

Exercise 14.3: Opening Your Mind

Like the members of the religion recovery group quoted earlier in this chapter, you may find that you still struggle against old, dogmatic ways of thinking. Developing critical thinking skills can help in this struggle. One way to do this is to dissect old concepts and examine their component attributes. This is essentially a strategy of *inductive thinking*, in which reasoning moves from the specific to the general. Raw data is organized to generate categories and concepts that help provide understanding. The result is a strengthening and broadening of your thinking.

Say you wanted to examine some key questions for which you once had hard and fast answers. Take the question "How can I have a satisfying life?" as an example. Your dogmatic answer was probably something like "By being a good Christian." That answer likely no longer works for you, but the question remains.

Begin by taking the question apart. "Life" is a broad concept, composed of many different components or domains: family, work, play, friends, physical well-being, spirituality, and so on. "Satisfying" means different things to different people. A Buddhist will define satisfaction entirely differently than will a yuppie, but both of their points of view are worth exploring. Organized on a grid, the question then might look like the top one on the following page.

To fill in this grid, you would need to temporarily adopt the point of view of each category of person. (You might also need to do some reading or other research to find out how such a person might approach each of the life domains.) In doing this, you might also discover values and beliefs that make sense to you or become more consciously aware of those you already hold. Some viewpoints will inevitably be less comfortable than others, either because you disagree with them or because they are simply unfamiliar. In either case, it is important to keep in mind that thinking about something is not the same as believing it or acting upon it. Thoughts are not dangerous in and of themselves. Simply note these areas of discomfort and relax; they cannot hurt you.

As an exercise, take the topic of religion (or another topic that interests you) and analyze how different faiths approach its various aspects: the deity's (or deities') characteristics, prayer, afterlife, and so on. The grid would look something like the ones on the following page.

Other opportunities for opening out your thinking patterns are all around you. Visit your local library or bookstore and make a point of browsing the sections you normally avoid or neglect. Open books at random and read passages. If something catches your interest, take the book home and read it. If something "instinctively" offends you, you might want to read that too—new ideas often take some getting used to.

The same approach can be used in conversing with other people, choosing movies to watch, and deciding where to spend your vacation.

Exercise 14.3: Opening Your Mind (Page 2)

Methods of Life Satisfaction					
Life Domain	Christians	Buddhists	Political Activists	Hedonists	Yuppies
Family Life					
Work/Career					
Play/Leisure					
Physical well-being					
Spiritual life					
Friends/social life					
Community/political involvement					

Components of Religious Systems					
Domain	Fundamentalism	Judaism	Islam	Buddhism	Secular Humanism
Deity					
Prayer					
Scripture					
Afterlife					
Enlightenment					
Prophet/Leader					
Historical Roots					
Human Purpose					

Exercise 14.3: Opening Your Mind (Page 3)

Try talking to people with different social, cultural, or economic backgrounds from your own. Watch foreign films or ones that concerning different American subcultures. Consider a trip to a large city if you live in a small town, or a rural area if you live in a city. Better yet, visit another country, and maybe even learn some of the language before you go. Almost anything that is unfamiliar will teach you something, and the more information you have, the more wide-ranging your thinking will be. New experiences are challenging—not dangerous.

Many former fundamentalists find it enormously helpful to begin reading more widely. The Appendix of this book offers suggestions that are directly relevant to recovery, personal growth, and alternative views on religion. More broadly, you would do well to consider bodies of literature that can broaden your understanding, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and philosophy. You may want to read feminist literature or cross-cultural writings. Exposing yourself to new ideals can also be done by taking classes, attending lectures, going to art shows, or watching TV specials, such as Bill Moyers' interviews with Joseph Campbell or his program "World of Ideas." If there is a subject you feel you know a little about, you can read or explore it specifically. For example, you could learn about the evidence for evolution and visit archeological sites such as Dinosaur National Monument in Utah. If you are puzzled by homophobia, read the news reports on biological origins, watch the movie "Torch Song Trilogy," and read the novel *Kiss of the Spider Women*, by Manuel Puig.

Basically, you need to take over responsibility for the information you have. If your reading has been censored or limited to Christian books, you will have serious gaps in your knowledge. Like a caring adult who wants a good education for his or her child, you can now go about getting it. This can be a very enjoyable exploration! Just be sure to approach the process with a childlike curiosity. Remember that the world is here is experience, not master, It would be a mistake to search anxiously for new *answers*. As Joseph Campbell said, "Life is not a problem to be solved; it is a mystery to be lived" (Cousineau and Brown, 1990).

Exercise 14.4: Daily Thoughts

In addition to having more data, you need to learn to trust your own ability to process the data, to draw your own conclusions. You are an intelligent being, worthy of your own respect. This exercise will give you a strong sense of the inner wisdom you possess. Get yourself a new, blank notebook that will be dedicated to this exercise. Then each day, take a few minutes to write a "thought for the day." Make it just a paragraph long, keeping it simple and true to what you believe.

This is like a book of daily meditations you might buy, only these are *your* ideas. Write them in the second person (to "you"), and keep them general enough to be useful to others. In other words, *you are the guru*, writing down the knowledge you have about life.

Any topic is fair game; write about anything that comes to you. One way to get going is to imagine imparting all that you know to a child or someone else who can benefit from the lessons you have learned about life. Sample topics are love, friendship, jealousy, ambition, giving, planning ahead, goals, forgiveness, physical health, sexuality, possessions, parenting, relating to parents, happiness, fun, relaxation, community, and so forth. Here is one I wrote on *uncertainty*:

Uncertainty only means that outcomes are unknown at the present time. There could be delightful surprises. If there are challenges or difficulties, it is very likely that you will rise to the occasion. Consider a small child who has not learned to be afraid. She is uncertain, yes—about what her day has in store, where Mommy might take her when she goes on errands, what is for dinner. But she is eager and smiling. Her eyes are wide, her hands are open, she is ready to receive, or even grab, the day's experiences. Uncertainty also means possibility.

Another piece is from Sarah, a religion recovery group member, on *relationships*:

If you value relationships and the uniqueness of people, reach out to them. Let them know who you are. Then try to let loose and let them do with it what they will. Feel good that you have reached out and created an opportunity. You have done all you can. It is up to them to accept the gift. They may not need the kind of gift you offer.

Try to write a short piece every day, for as long as you like, but for *at least* two weeks. Over time, you will gain a new respect for your own thinking. You will realize how much you already know. You have a rich inner resource of wisdom. This confidence is a potent weapon against your idea monster when you are criticized for trusting your own thinking. You have a capable adult that can take good care of your child.

Use the following spaces to get you started:

Exercise 14.4: Daily Thoughts (Page 2)

TOPIC:

TOPIC:

TOPIC:

TOPIC:

Exercise 15.1: Values Clarification

Pick ten values from each of the following two lists and then prioritize each of your lists by marking the values from 1 to 10. The first list, Outcome Values, concerns the results that you seek to achieve in your life or the conditions that you hope to find. The second list, Personal Trait Values, contains adjectives that might describe the person you *want to be*. Understanding and accepting your values this way can help you set goals more clearly, which is the subject of later exercises.

OUTCOME VALUES

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advancement | <input type="checkbox"/> Power | <input type="checkbox"/> Nururance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity | <input type="checkbox"/> Status | <input type="checkbox"/> Approval |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Independence | <input type="checkbox"/> Competence | <input type="checkbox"/> Joy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Material comfort | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace of mind | <input type="checkbox"/> Excitement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Service to others | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Privacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Security | <input type="checkbox"/> Intimacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Duty | <input type="checkbox"/> Popularity | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensuality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-reliance | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Novelty | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitivity | <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality | _____ |

PERSONAL TRAIT VALUES

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dependable | <input type="checkbox"/> Joyful | <input type="checkbox"/> Productive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-disciplined | <input type="checkbox"/> Wise | <input type="checkbox"/> Attractive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally stable | <input type="checkbox"/> Content | <input type="checkbox"/> Wealthy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open-minded | <input type="checkbox"/> Unique | <input type="checkbox"/> Personable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honest | <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous | <input type="checkbox"/> Expressive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual | <input type="checkbox"/> Loving | <input type="checkbox"/> Generous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Exciting | <input type="checkbox"/> Uninhibited |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competent | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Humorous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surprising | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensuous | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inspiring | <input type="checkbox"/> Gentle | _____ |

Discussion:

Exercise 15.2: Goal Setting

You have probably heard the phrase “not deciding is deciding.” That is no way not to proceed with your life! So it makes enormous sense to figure out what you want. Otherwise the outcomes of your life will be random and you will certainly not fulfill any dreams.

This exercise presents a method for clarifying the structure of personal goals or desires in your life, ranging from immediate objectives to broad values. Remember that “goals” include *all* the things that you want to achieve, not just the big achievements. They can be as simple and immediate as “Play checkers with my son,” as involved as “Help develop programs at the boys’ club,” or as long-term and complex as “Work on world hunger.”

They can be things that you actively do to get satisfaction, like “spend time with friends” or plans to avoid a problem, such as “stop losing my temper.” Problem-solving is also a goal, such as “getting the car fixed.”

The following grid shows a useful way of approaching this task. It divides your life into various domains to help you think about what you would like to achieve in each of these areas. It also divides your life temporally, since some goals will take more time than others.

Personal Goals							
	Family	Career (Work/School)	Social	Personal Growth/Health	Play/Leisure	Material/Financial	Other
1-4 Weeks							
1-12 Months							
1-5 Years							

Copy these categories onto paper in a way that will work for you (or used the attached chart), giving ample space for each section. As you list your goals, try to be as thorough as you can while working quickly and spontaneously. Remember that your goals are not “right” or “wrong” and don’t need to be consistent or reasonable. The total number of goals written in each category is up to you.

Some of your goals will necessarily be broad, general, or abstract, such as “Get in shape,” “Become successful,” or “Find peace of mind.” With these goals further work will be needed to make them achievable. For example, getting in shape could be broken down into smaller goals: “Lose 25 pounds” and “Get more exercise.” You would then need to plan *how* to lose the weight—“Get a checkup,” “Start a low-fat diet,” “Daily exercise”—and set a realistic goal in terms of *time*, say five pounds per month. Similarly, getting exercise could be defined as “Walk for an hour Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. Go to the gym Tuesday, Thursday, and

Exercise 5.2: Goal Setting

Saturday—swim and weights.” In this way, what might seem like overwhelming goals become surmountable.

The ultimate object is to have a list of small steps you can take on a more or less daily basis to accomplish your larger goals. However, it will probably take further thought and research to arrive at those steps. Goal setting is an ongoing process. As you achieve some goals, others will take their place. Some goals may become less important over time, as your perspective shifts. This inventory can be done repeatedly with interesting results.

In doing this exercise, you may find yourself thinking “I’d like to do x, but y would prevent me from accomplishing it.” Whatever y is for you, it’s important to learn to think of it as a problem to be solved, rather than a barrier to achievement. When you’ve finished listing your goals, ask yourself the following questions. You might want to use your answers as a guide in setting further goals.

- 1. What was it like to put my goals into words?*
- 2. Do I have many goals? How do I feel about that?*
- 3. How are my goals distributed? That is, how are they spread across time frames and across life domains? What does that indicate about me?*
- 4. Is there anything I would like to change about my goals?*

Exercise 5.3: Review and Preview

Once you have defined things you can do on a daily basis to achieve your larger goals, you need to put those steps into practice. This is an exercise in taking one day at a time and exercising the power of choice in your life. Plan to apply this procedure for at least a week to understand the effect.

At the beginning of your day, take ten minutes out to relax, close your eyes, and visualize or *preview* the coming day. You can actually picture your day as if you were watching a movie—a movie you are directing. You have the power to create the kind of day you want to have. Visualize the key events of the day that you expect, identify your important goals for that day, and see yourself achieving them. Take enough time to move through the entire day, experiencing each part in the way that you choose.

If there is a personal quality that you want to enhance in yourself—such as assertiveness, gentleness, energy, courage, serenity, or joy—allow an image to form that represents this element in you. Give the image dimensions of color, shape, size, temperature, sound, movement, and texture. Notice where you feel this quality in your body and whether it extends from your body. Then imagine keeping this quality as you go about your day. Slowly picture your entire day. (You might also imagine losing touch with the personal quality you are trying to cultivate. At that point, visualize stopping to center yourself and regaining the quality again.) Finish previewing the rest of the day with success in being the way you want to be.

During the day, you can stop at any time to recapture the effect of this imagery procedure. Simply review the events or re-create the quality you are developing by going through the sensory description again.

Finish your day by *reviewing*. Mentally, look over what actually happened and compare it with your preview. Pat yourself on the back for what you liked, and *learn from* what was disappointing. Remember that this is a time for gaining knowledge, not for judgment. If you did not meet your expectations, try to understand why. Be gentle and talk to your inner child about how things can be different tomorrow. Write a summary of how the day went.

In the next day's preview, you can start the process all over again, with the benefit of lessons learned. Remember to focus on one day at a time!

Although simply using visualization is helpful, keeping a structured journal will enhance this exercise by helping you keep track of your daily goals and daily accomplishments.

Monday, March 10

Preview: Plan to stay more relaxed. Don't try to do too much. Just do what I can today and not feel guilty. I imagine a soft, golden ball of relaxation in my belly, humming and radiating out to the rest of my body. When I breathe deeply, it expands and gives me a good feeling. I see myself getting ready for work. I feed myself, shower, and dress without rushing. I have a relaxed day at work, concentrating well. At lunch, I feel pressured to work through, but

Exercise 15.3: Review and Preview (Page 2)

feeling okay about those that are unfinished. I go home, prepare dinner, eat with my family. I read the paper while the others clean up and then watch a little TV with my kids. I go to bed and read a book before sleeping.

Review: I did well in the morning, not rushing around as much as usual. I think I still need a little more time, so I will get up a little earlier tomorrow. Work was much more relaxed and I felt fine when I finally got together with Karen at lunch. I enjoyed lunch! Not everything is future reward. The afternoon got a little uptight so I had to stop and relax about 3:00. The golden ball is a very comforting visualization and easy to re-create. The evening was good except that I felt some guilt for not bringing some work home. Need to keep working on that one!

A variation on this exercise that could help you discover long-term goals is to visualize your perfect day. Imagining what you really want is the first step toward making it come true. In her book *Wishcraft* (1979), Barbara Sher provides valuable guidance for making your dreams come true, from fantasizing to concrete planning and achievement. To help clarify what you want, she suggests an exercise of "real daydreaming," in which you imagine every detail of an average day in your life as you would love it to be. As you see, feel, and experience this day, you write down a sequential, present-tense description of what is happening. Include everything about what you do, where you are, and who is with you. Let your imagination go and forget about any limitations.

The point here is to trust yourself. The desires and intuitions that you have are valid. You have great potential to become the person you want to be and do the things that you want to do.

Many perceived limitations are simply problems and you are capable of developing the skills you need. Whether you want to improve your human relations skills, learn to sail, or study a foreign language, these options are open to you. In the past you may have heard snide remarks about self-improvement or cautionary words about the dangers of self-esteem. Such thinking serves to prevent personal empowerment. Now you have the privilege of "responsibility"!