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WeHealUS

KNOW YOUR STORY

A practical *roadmap* to healing

A workbook for understanding what your body has been carrying — and what to do next.

A self-paced companion for understanding your Adverse Childhood Experiences score, your protective factors, and the seven places healing lives. Backed by 25+ years of research from the CDC and Kaiser Permanente. For anyone aged 16–70+.

Created by WeHealUS · A public-private partnership for healing-centered care · wehealus.org

BEFORE WE BEGIN

What if your body has been *telling the truth* the whole time?

In the next 30 to 60 minutes — at your pace, with breaks whenever you need them — you'll discover how your earliest experiences may still be shaping your health, your relationships, and your reactions today. And what you can actually do about it.

This workbook is yours. Write in it. Skip pages. Come back later. The questions touch real wounds — you can stop anywhere. There are no grades, no audience, no judgment.

A word before we begin

If anything in this workbook feels overwhelming, please reach out to someone you trust, or call/text **988** anytime — the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. You are not alone, and you do not have to do this work in isolation.

How to use this workbook

- Take it slow.** One section per sitting is plenty. Some sections may take longer than others — that's information, not a problem.
- Use a pen.** Writing by hand activates a different part of the brain than typing. The physical act matters.
- Skip what doesn't fit.** If a question doesn't resonate, move on. Come back later, or don't.
- Notice your body.** If you feel activated, pause. Walk. Get water. Come back when you can.

What's inside

01 **The ACEs Quiz**
10 questions about your first 18 years

02 **Protective Factors (PCEs)**
7 questions about the good that was also there

03 Your Score & What It Means

The data, with hope built in

04 How Childhood Lives in the Present

Body, relationships, work — with real examples

05 Seven Places Healing Lives

Mind · Body · Food · Triggers · People · Journaling · Environment

06 Your Path Forward

Reflections, teachers, and where to go next

SECTION 01

The ACEs Quiz

These 10 questions come from the original CDC–Kaiser Permanente ACE Study (Felitti et al., 1998). They are a starting point — not a diagnosis, and not a verdict on your future.

Instructions: For each question, check **Yes** or **No**. Skip any question you'd rather not answer. At the end, count your "Yes" answers — that number, from 0 to 10, is your **ACEs score**.

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid you might be physically hurt?

Emotional abuse

Yes No

-
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

Physical abuse

Yes No

-
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older ever touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or attempt or have any kind of sexual contact with you?

Sexual abuse

Yes No

4. Did you often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or that your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

Emotional neglect

Yes No

5. Did you often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or that your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if needed?

Physical neglect

Yes No

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

Loss of biological parent

Yes No

7. Was your mother or stepmother often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?

Mother treated violently

Yes No

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?

Household substance abuse

Yes No

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?

Household mental illness

Yes No

10. Did a household member go to prison?

Incarcerated household member

Yes No



TOTAL · COUNT YOUR "YES" ANSWERS

My ACEs score is _____ out of 10

Write the number in the circle. We'll come back to it in Section 03.

SECTION 02

Protective Factors

These 7 questions come from the Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) scale (Bethell et al., 2019, *JAMA Pediatrics*). They measure the good that was also there — the experiences that build resilience, even alongside adversity.

Instructions: For each statement, check **Often / Always** or **Sometimes / Never**. Count your "Often / Always" answers — that's your **PCEs score**, from 0 to 7.

Before you were 18, how often was this true?

1. I felt able to talk to my family about my feelings.

Often /
Always

Sometimes /
Never

2. I felt my family stood by me during difficult times.

Often /
Always

Sometimes /
Never

3. I enjoyed participating in community traditions.

Often /
Always

Sometimes /
Never

4. I felt a sense of belonging in high school (or my equivalent).

Often /
Always

Sometimes /
Never

5. I felt supported by friends.

Often /
Always

Sometimes /
Never

6. I had at least two non-parent adults who took a genuine interest in me.

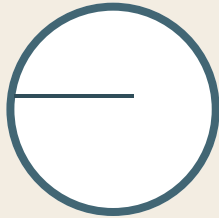
Often /
Always

Sometimes /
Never

7. I felt safe and protected by an adult in my home.

Often /
Always

Sometimes /
Never



TOTAL · COUNT YOUR "OFTEN / ALWAYS" ANSWERS

My PCEs score is _____ out of 7

Even at high ACE levels, strong PCEs predict better adult mental and relational health.

SECTION 03

Your Score & What It Means

Your score is **information, not a sentence**. The original researchers called it "a cholesterol score for childhood toxic stress" — useful guidance, never a verdict.

Finding your range

Look at your ACEs score and find your band below.

YOUR ACEs SCORE	WHAT THIS RANGE TELLS US
0	About one-third of adults are here. Adversity may have come later in life — it still counts.
1–2	About one-third of adults. Some adversity, often well-buffered if PCEs are present.
3	Significant adversity. About 17% of adults score here or higher.
4–5	Higher range. Body-based effects more likely. Healing protocols matter.
6+	Very high range. Deserves real care. Consider a trauma-informed therapist as a next step.

About **64% of U.S. adults** report at least one ACE. About **1 in 6** report four or more. You are not alone, and you are not broken.

What research has found at higher scores

Risks below are **statistical averages** from large studies — not predictions about you. Strong PCEs and adult protective relationships buffer these risks significantly.

HEALTH OUTCOME	ACE 0–1	ACE 2–3	ACE 4+	ACE 6+
Heart disease	baseline	1.5×	2.1×	2.4×
Depression (lifetime)	baseline	2.0×	4.5×	5.3×
Autoimmune hospitalization	baseline	1.5×	2.1×	2.4×
Smoking	baseline	1.6×	2.2×	2.6×
Problematic alcohol use	baseline	2.0×	5.7×	7.4×
Attempted suicide	baseline	3.0×	12.2×	30.1×

Sources: Felitti et al. 1998; Hughes et al. 2017 meta-analysis. See citations at the end.

And here is the hope.

Resilience is not something you're born with or without. It is *built* — at any age, in any decade — by what you do, who you let close, and how you tend to your body and nervous system.

78%

possible reduction in depression at the population level

22%

possible reduction in heart disease cases

89%

possible reduction in teen suicide attempts

CDC modeling estimates if ACEs were prevented or buffered.

REFLECTION · WRITE HERE

When you saw your score, what was the very first feeling that came up — before you reasoned about it?

SECTION 04

How Childhood Lives in the Present

You are not "too sensitive." Your nervous system *remembers*. When the body learned early that the world was unpredictable, it kept those instincts on standby. Recognizing them is the first act of healing.

In your body

HEART & VASCULAR

Higher resting heart rate, blood pressure spikes under conflict

An ACE score of 4+ is associated with roughly double the rate of heart disease and stroke.

Sounds like: *My doctor said my blood pressure spikes whenever I see his name in my inbox.*

INFLAMMATION

Autoimmune patterns, hives, eczema, IBS, fibromyalgia

Toxic childhood stress alters immune regulation. Many adults find flares track with emotional load, not allergens.

Sounds like: *Every time I visit my mother, the rash comes back within 48 hours.*

SLEEP

Wired-tired, 3 a.m. awakenings, hard time falling asleep

The vigilance system that kept you safe is still on watch. Cortisol curves often run inverted in trauma survivors.

Sounds like: *I can do anything during the day, but I can't make my body trust the dark.*

GUT

Sensitive stomach, food reactions, mast cell symptoms

The gut-brain axis carries stress directly. Histamine intolerance and bloating often have a nervous-system root.

Sounds like: *I have a 'fight with my partner' diet — soft foods, no nightshades.*

In your relationships

ATTACHMENT

TRUST

People-pleasing, fawning, or going silent under conflict
The child learned that softness or invisibility kept them safe. The adult does it on autopilot.

Sounds like: *I said yes again before I even checked my calendar — or my body.*

Hypervigilance to tone, sudden silence, micro-expressions
You read rooms others don't see. It's a survival skill that became a tax.

Sounds like: *She paused for two seconds and I spent the rest of the day replaying it.*

INTIMACY

Pulling away when things get good · or · fusing too fast
The nervous system codes closeness as danger or as oxygen — sometimes both at once.

Sounds like: *The moment he said 'I love you' was the moment I started looking for the exit.*

CONFLICT

Disproportionate reactions — or no reaction at all
What looks like overreaction is usually the original wound speaking through today's voice.

Sounds like: *I screamed about the dishes. It wasn't about the dishes.*

In your work and choices

PRODUCTIVITY

Overworking as a regulation strategy
Achievement was once how you earned safety. The body keeps reaching for that lever.

Sounds like: *If I'm not exhausted by Friday, I feel like I cheated.*

SELF-TALK

Harsh inner critic that sounds like someone you knew
The voice you call "yourself" is often a borrowed voice from age seven.

Sounds like: *I caught myself saying to my kid what my mother said to me — verbatim.*

SUBSTANCES

Wine, weed, food, screens, shopping — anything that turns the volume down
Gabor Maté: "The question isn't why the addiction. The question is why the pain."

Sounds like: *It's not that I drink too much. It's that I can't feel my shoulders without it.*

BODY KEEPSAKE

Headaches, jaw tension, chronic pain with no clear cause
What was unspeakable found a way to speak through the body.

Sounds like: *I clench my jaw so hard at night I cracked a tooth.*

A note on language

What we call "trauma response" is the body's **intelligence**, not its malfunction. Every effect on these pages was, once, a solution. Healing means thanking the strategy for keeping you alive — and gently teaching the body it doesn't need to anymore.

REFLECTION · WRITE HERE

Which of the effects above felt the most familiar? Circle it on the page.
Then write — what is it costing you, now?

SECTION 05

Seven Places Healing Lives

Sustainable change doesn't come from one heroic month — it comes from **small things, done often, for a long time**. Pick one place. Start small. Stay consistent.

Each of the next seven sections covers one place healing lives. Each has a starting practice, what to do when you're ready, what to skip, and how it changes by decade. Read them in any order.



PLACE ONE

Mind & nervous system

Trauma lives in the body's stress response, not the thinking brain. Talking alone usually isn't enough. The goal is teaching the nervous system, through repetition, that the danger has passed.

Start here — 5 minutes a day

- Physiological sigh.** Two short inhales through the nose, one long exhale through the mouth. Three rounds. Reduces stress hormones within ~90 seconds.
- Cold water on the face.** 30 seconds. Triggers the dive reflex, drops heart rate, signals safety.
- Humming, singing, gargling.** Stimulates the vagus nerve directly. Hum for 60 seconds in the shower.
- Bilateral movement.** Walking, swimming, drumming — left-right rhythm helps integrate stuck activation.

When you're ready, seek

- EMDR** (Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing) — strong evidence for trauma; you don't have to talk about the event.
- Somatic Experiencing** (Peter Levine's method) — works with body sensation, not story.
- Internal Family Systems (IFS)** — meets the "parts" of you with curiosity instead of judgment.
- A trauma-informed therapist** — Psychology Today's directory lets you filter for trauma-trained clinicians.

Skip this: "Just think positive." Cognitive reframing without body work tends to push activation deeper. The body needs to be addressed, too.

16-24

Try one breath practice + one body-based therapy. Avoid heavy talk therapy that re-traumatizes without coping skills.

25-44

Therapy works best in *seasons* — not forever. Brief, focused, repeated.

45-64

Hormonal shifts re-open old wounds. Don't pathologize the unraveling — work with it.

65-70+

Life review and forgiveness journaling have measurable health effects here.

TAKE IT INWARD

Which one practice from above will you try this week — and when, specifically?



PLACE TWO

Body & movement

The body is where trauma is stored — and where it can be released. The goal isn't fitness; it's restoring trust between you and your physical self.

- Walking outdoors, 20 min/day.** Free, sustainable, regulates everything. Bilateral and meditative at once.
- Trauma-informed yoga.** Look for teachers trained in TCTSY (Trauma Center Trauma-Sensitive Yoga).
- Strength training.** Two sessions a week. Builds "window of tolerance" faster than almost anything.
- Restorative practices.** Yin yoga, tai chi, qigong — slow, repetitive, deeply parasympathetic.
- Sleep as medicine.** Same time bed, same time wake, last screen 90 minutes early.

Gentle hint: If high-intensity workouts leave you wired and exhausted (not energized), your body may be telling you it needs *down-regulation*, not more stimulation. Listen.

16-24

Build the habit, not the body. 20 minutes of any movement beats a perfect plan you skip.

25-44

Strength training is non-negotiable for long-term metabolic and mood health.

45-64

Protect joints, prioritize mobility, lift heavy enough to matter.

65-70+

Balance work daily. Falls are the #1 preventable health risk. Tai chi shows strong evidence.



PLACE THREE

Food & nutrition

Trauma changes the gut microbiome. The gut, in turn, makes most of your serotonin and modulates inflammation everywhere. This is not a side issue.

The foundations

- Protein at every meal.** Especially breakfast within 60 minutes of waking. Stabilizes blood sugar and mood.
- Real, recognizable food.** If it has more than five ingredients on the label, ask why.
- Polyphenols and color.** Berries, leafy greens, herbs, olive oil, dark chocolate.
- Hydration with minerals.** Plain water + a pinch of unprocessed salt; nervous systems run on electrolytes.
- Fiber, daily.** Beans, oats, vegetables. Feeds the gut bacteria that make your neurotransmitters.

If you have inflammation, hives, or autoimmune patterns

- Try a **low-histamine season** (4–6 weeks): avoid fermented foods, aged cheeses, alcohol, leftovers older than 24 hours, citrus, tomatoes, vinegar, smoked or cured meats.
- Keep it simple: fresh meat, white rice, gentle vegetables, fresh apples/pears/blueberries, pumpkin seeds, olive oil.
- Consider **quercetin with bromelain** as a natural mast-cell stabilizer (talk to your doctor first).

The big secret: Most trauma survivors don't eat *enough*. Underfueling keeps the body in stress. Eat more, sooner.

16-24

Breakfast within an hour of waking, even if small. This single habit changes a decade.

25-44

Watch the wine-as-self-care pattern. Alcohol is the #1 disruptor of sleep and gut healing.

45-64

Protein needs go up, not down. ~1g per pound of ideal body weight, spread across the day.

65-70+

Protein adequacy + B12 + vitamin D are the three things that matter most. Check blood work.



Triggers, forgiveness & meaning

A trigger is not a personality flaw. It's a memory the body is showing you because it's finally ready to be metabolized.

When you get triggered — the 4-step practice

1. **Notice.** Name what you feel. "I'm activated. My chest is tight."
2. **Slow down.** Long exhale. Feet on the floor. Find five things you can see. You are safe in *this* moment.
3. **Ask, gently.** "How old does this feeling feel?" The answer tells you whose pain you're holding.
4. **Respond, don't react.** Whatever you do next — say it slower, write it instead of sending, sleep on it.

On forgiveness — what it actually is and isn't

Forgiveness is not: reconciliation, forgetting, excusing, going back, or saying it didn't matter. It is also not a one-time event.

Forgiveness is: the slow, often years-long process of releasing yourself from the cost of carrying it. It's a gift you eventually give yourself, with no obligation to the other person.

- Write the letter you'll never send.
- Speak the truth to a witness — therapist, group, trusted friend.
- Allow rage to move through the body (running, hitting a pillow, screaming in the car).
- Notice the day you remember without the surge. That's the marker.

If someone tells you to "just forgive": they are speaking from their own discomfort with your pain. Take your time.

FOR YOUR BODY TO KNOW

What is one trigger that's been showing up lately? When you slow down enough to ask "how old does this feel?" — what age comes up?



People, community & giving

The cure for the wound of relationship is, eventually, relationship. Strong PCEs found that **safe community is one of the strongest buffers against ACEs** — and you can build it at any age.

Receiving (often the harder one)

- One person who knows the real version of you. Just one is enough to start.
- Practice asking for the smallest thing — a refill, a hug, a hand carrying something.
- Let someone do something for you and don't immediately repay it.

Peer support communities worth knowing

- TARAnon** · starnetwork.org/taranon — for friends and family of those affected by trauma, abuse, and adversity. A program of the TAR Network Foundation.
- NAMI Support Groups** · nami.org — free peer-led groups for mental health conditions.
- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** · aa.org — for those whose drinking has become a problem.
- Al-Anon** · al-anon.org — for friends and family of alcoholics.
- Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families (ACA)** · adultchildren.org
- Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA)** · coda.org
- GriefShare** · griefshare.org — grief support groups across the country.

Giving (the medicine that gives back)

- Tutor, mentor, coach.** Becoming the adult you needed is one of the most healing acts in the human catalog.
- Volunteer.** Animal shelters, hospice, food banks, schools.
- Notice strangers.** Eye contact, a kind word, a held door. Small repeated acts rewire the nervous system toward safety.
- Care for plants or animals.** Practice non-extractive love.

The healing math: Giving without receiving leads to burnout. Receiving without giving leads to shame. The work is learning to do both, gently.



PLACE SIX

Journaling & expressive writing

Of all the free, sustainable, age-friendly healing practices, journaling has some of the strongest research behind it. Dr. James Pennebaker's foundational studies showed that just **15–20 minutes of expressive writing, 3–4 days in a row**, measurably reduces stress hormones, improves immune function, lowers blood pressure, and reduces depression and anxiety symptoms.

Five practices to try

- Morning pages.** Three handwritten pages, stream-of-consciousness, first thing.
- Gratitude with specificity.** Not "my family" — "my daughter laughed at my joke at dinner."
- The letter you'll never send.** Don't send it. The healing is in the writing.
- The nighttime brain-dump.** Everything swirling, onto paper. Especially powerful for insomnia.
- Parts dialogue.** "The part of me that's afraid says..." Then: "The part of me that's tired says..."

Skip this: Don't journal a fresh trauma when your nervous system is fully activated — it can re-traumatize. Regulate first (breath, walk, a trusted person), then write later.

Three prompts — try one right now

PROMPT 1 · FOR YOUR BODY

What is one thing your body has been trying to tell you that you've been too busy to hear?

PROMPT 2 · FOR THE YOUNGER YOU

What is one thing the younger version of you needed to hear — that no one said?

PROMPT 3 · FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

If healing were a small daily practice — not a project — what would the first 5 minutes of tomorrow look like?



Environment

Your environment is your nervous system, externalized. What you see, hear, breathe, and live in is shaping you every minute.

- Nature, daily if possible.** 20 minutes outside drops cortisol meaningfully. Trees, water, sky, soil.
- Sunlight in the morning.** 5–10 minutes within an hour of waking sets your circadian rhythm for the whole day.
- Reduce noise pollution.** Constant low-level noise is processed as background threat.
- Air quality.** Open windows, add plants, change HVAC filters.
- One peaceful room.** Even just a corner. A chair, a candle, a window — your "reset" location.
- Curate your inputs.** Notifications, news, doom-scrolling, toxic group chats — these are environmental factors too.

Gabor Maté on this: *"It's not your genes, it's not your fault — it's your environment, the culture you live in, and what happened to you. And it can be changed."*

NOTICE THIS WEEK

Walk through your home with new eyes. Which room feels like rest? Which room costs you energy? What is one small change you could make this week?

SECTION 06

Your Path Forward

You did real work in these pages. Now let's land it somewhere — a real plan, three questions to carry, and the teachers and resources who can walk the next mile with you.

Make your plan — one small thing in each place

You don't have to do everything. You don't even have to do most things. Pick **one** practice from each of the places that pulled at you. Write them below. Tape this page somewhere you'll see it.

PLACE	THIS WEEK, I WILL...
Mind & nervous system	_____
Body & movement	_____
Food & nutrition	_____
Triggers & forgiveness	_____
People & community	_____
Journaling	_____
Environment	_____

Three questions to carry

FOR TONIGHT

What is one thing in this workbook that felt familiar — almost like it was written about you?

FOR THIS WEEK

If you could give yourself one of the seven places as a gift, which would it be?

FOR THE LONGER ARC

Who is one person in your life — alive or in memory — who saw you, even briefly? What did they see?

Teachers worth your time



Dr. Gabor Maté

Physician · trauma & addiction

Compassionate Inquiry method, addiction-as-adaptation framing. Required reading for understanding the body-mind link. His book *The Myth of Normal* is the one we recommend most often.

drgabormate.com



**Dr. Bessel van der
Kolk**

Psychiatrist · trauma research

Author of *The Body Keeps the Score*. Pioneer of integrating yoga, neurofeedback, EMDR, and theater into trauma treatment.

besselvanderkolk.com



**Dr. Nadine Burke
Harris**

Pediatrician · ACEs in medicine

Author of *The Deepest Well*. Brought ACE screening into mainstream pediatric medicine. Former Surgeon General of California.

acesaware.org



Beth Tyson, MA

Childhood trauma therapist · author

Psychotherapist, childhood grief and trauma consultant, and children's book author. Practical, warm, refreshingly free of jargon.

bethtyson.com



Eckhart Tolle

Presence · spiritual teacher

Author of *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*. Teaches that suffering is rooted in identification with the thinking mind.

eckharttolle.com



David Ghiyam

Spiritual teacher · transformation

One of the world's leading spiritual teachers, with over two decades of teaching and 20,000+ hours of personal coaching. His free *Weekly Elevation* teachings are a gentle entry point.

davidghiyam.com



Thomas Hübl

Mystic · collective trauma

Author of *Healing Collective Trauma*. Integrates mystical principles with the science of intergenerational and cultural trauma.

thomashuebl.com



Stephen Porges, PhD

Polyvagal Theory · nervous system science

Developer of **Polyvagal Theory** — the framework that underlies much of modern trauma treatment. Explains why safety, co-regulation, and connection are biological needs.

stephenporges.com



Dr. Uma Naidoo, MD

Nutritional psychiatry · food & mood

Harvard-trained psychiatrist, professional chef, and nutrition specialist. Founder of the first hospital-based Nutritional Psychiatry Service in the U.S. Author of *This Is Your Brain on Food*.

umanaidoomd.com

Trusted resources & support

- TARAnon** · starnetwork.org/taranon — peer support for friends and family of those affected by trauma, abuse, and adversity.
- ACEs Aware** · acesaware.org — California's clinician toolkit, open to the public.
- CDC ACEs page** · cdc.gov/aces — official data, statistics, and prevention strategy.
- Psychology Today therapist finder** · psychologytoday.com/us/therapists — filter for trauma, EMDR, IFS, or somatic.
- 988** — Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text), 24/7, free, confidential.
- NAMI** · nami.org — free peer support groups in nearly every state.

You did real work today.

Knowing your ACE score doesn't change what happened. But knowing what your body has been carrying — and what's been keeping it carrying — is the start of laying some of it down. Be gentle. Healing isn't linear, and it isn't a contest.

— With love, from the WeHealUS team.

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This workbook is educational, not medical advice. If you are in crisis, please call or text 988.