

Still the Parent

The Workbook

The companion workbook to A Guide for Parents
with Estranged Adult Children

L.M. Harwood
stilltheparent.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

About L.M. Harwood

L.M. Harwood is an Australian author who experienced estrangement personally. She wrote ***A Guide for Parents with Estranged Adult Children*** from lived experience — and from the recognition that parents navigating this loss are one of the most underserved communities in the mental health and self-help space.

Her work is grounded in psychology, grief research, and neuroscience — and shaped by what she knows from the inside. The cultural narrative around estrangement is almost universally weighted against parents. Therapists frequently diagnose the parent without meeting them. There is profound isolation — a grief with no funeral and no social permission. L.M. Harwood writes for that parent.

Linda writes under several pen names and for several genre. All her books, including ***A Guide for Parents with Estranged Adult Children*** can be found at lindas-books.com.

ABOUT THE WORKBOOK

From the Author

When I wrote *A Guide for Parents with Estranged Adult Children*, I identified six stages of grief that many parents experience during estrangement. Understanding those stages helped me make sense of what I was feeling, and it became the foundation for everything that followed.

The *Still the Parent* website was created as a daily companion to the book. When you join, the website helps identify which stage of grief you are currently experiencing and then provides daily prompts and weekly affirmations tailored to where you are in your journey. As you respond to the prompts, the system continually reassesses your progress and adjusts the support you receive.

This workbook has been created for those who prefer a more traditional approach.

Rather than receiving prompts online, you will find them here in these pages as exercises. The exercises follow the same six stages of grief identified in the original book, giving you a structured way to reflect, write, and record your thoughts in your own journal. The difference is simple: the website adapts to you with the assistance of AI technology; this workbook allows you to guide yourself at your own pace.

There is no right way to use these resources. Some people prefer the daily support of the website. Others prefer the quiet reflection of pen and paper. Many use both.

Whichever path you choose, remember:

You are still the parent.

That never changes.

— Linda Harwood

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HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is divided into six stages — each representing a phase of the estrangement journey, from the initial shock of what happened through to building a life that is genuinely and fully yours again.

You do not need to be at a particular stage to begin. Start where you are. If the exercises in Stage 1 feel like where you are right now, begin there. If you feel further along, move to the stage that reflects your experience.

Each chapter opens with the ten affirmations for that stage. These are not instructions or prescriptions — they are statements you can return to, especially on the harder days. Read them slowly. Write any that feel particularly true, or particularly needed.

The exercises come in three formats:

WRITE An open writing exercise. Write whatever comes. There is no wrong answer.

STARTER Sentence starters are provided. Complete whichever feels right, and leave others blank.

SELECT Options are provided. Circle the ones that apply to you. Then write your thoughts.

Many exercises include a second question — a counterweight. These are marked with a small symbol and appear after the main exercise. They offer a different perspective: either turning you gently toward yourself, or asking you to look forward. You do not have to answer them. But they are often where the most important writing happens.

At the back of this workbook you will find the Milestone Exercises — exercises specifically written for the hardest dates in the calendar. Your child's birthday. Mother's Day or Father's Day. Christmas. These exercises are designed to be used in the days before those dates arrive.

There is no pace to maintain. There is no deadline. This workbook belongs to you.

F O R T H E H A R D E S T D A Y S

Affirmations for the Hardest Days

These affirmations are for the days when everything feels impossible. You do not have to believe them fully. You only have to read them.

Print them out and look at them several times a day

1. *This pain will pass. It has before and it will again.*
2. *I have survived every hard day until now. I will survive this one too.*
3. *I do not have to fix anything today. I only have to get through today.*
4. *I am not alone in this, even when I feel completely alone.*
5. *This moment is not the whole story.*
6. *I am worthy of love and care — from others and from myself.*
7. *It is enough to still be here.*
8. *Tomorrow I will feel differently. I do not have to feel better today.*
9. *I am allowed to ask for help.*
10. *I am stronger than this moment makes me feel.*

Stage 1 Realization

The first stage is the one you did not choose and did not see coming — or perhaps you saw it building slowly, and still could not believe it when it arrived.

Estrangement in its early days is a state of shock. The mind does not process it the way it processes other losses because the person is still alive, still somewhere in the world, and yet completely absent from your life. There is no funeral, no ritual, no social permission to grieve. People do not know what to say. Many say the wrong thing.

What you feel in this stage is real. The disbelief, the physical symptoms, the constant replay of events — these are not signs of weakness. They are the proportionate response of a loving parent to an extraordinary loss.

Healing begins at looking at your grief at a deeper level. The exercises in this stage ask you to begin identifying what has happened. Not to fix it, not to understand it fully — but simply to say: this is what I am going through. That is where healing begins.

This may be one of the more confronting stages.

STAGE 1 AFFIRMATIONS

Return to these whenever you need them. On the hard days especially.

1. *This pain is real and it deserves to be acknowledged.*
2. *I am not alone. Millions of parents carry what I am carrying.*
3. *I did not cause this by being a bad person.*
4. *I am allowed to grieve. This loss is real even though there is no funeral.*
5. *I will not always feel the way I feel today.*
6. *I am surviving something most people will never understand.*
7. *My love for my child is real, even when it is not returned.*
8. *I am more than what has happened to me.*
9. *This is the hardest thing I have ever carried — and I am still here.*
10. *It is enough, today, just to keep going.*

STAGE 1 EXERCISES

When did it begin?

When did the estrangement begin, and how did you first understand what was happening? There is no right answer. Write what you actually remember.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The silence started when...

The first time I truly understood something was wrong was...

What I remember most from those early days is...(this can be how you felt, what you said, who you said it to etc.)

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Now that you have named when it began — what is one thing that has not been taken from you, no matter what has happened?(this can be your compassion, how you treat your family, your love, your ability to keep working etc)

What does the silence feel like?

Describe what the silence or absence feels like — not what it means, what it actually feels like. In your body. In your daily life. In the quiet moments.

Select all that apply — tick your answer(s):

- ☐ Lonely
- ☐ Sad
- ☐ Disbelief — it doesn't feel real
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Physically sickening
- ☐ Like a weight I carry constantly
- ☐ Numb
- ☐ Something else

What is your mind telling you about these feelings? For example, does it tell you that you shouldn't feel this way, that you need to come to terms with it, or something else entirely?

◆ Turning toward yourself

Even in the middle of that feeling — what tells you that you are stronger than this moment? It might be small (eg; I am still getting out of bed every day, I'm not giving up, I am trying to heal) . Write it down anyway.

What is hardest for you?

What is the hardest part of this experience for you specifically? Not the hardest part in general — the hardest part for you.

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ The loneliness
- ☐ The shame
- ☐ Not knowing why
- ☐ The guilt
- ☐ The silence itself
- ☐ Not being able to talk about it
- ☐ Missing who they used to be
- ☐ Something else

My thoughts: *Of the answers you selected, which one feels the heaviest right now? What makes that part so difficult for you? What do you find yourself thinking about most when it comes up?*

◆ Turning toward yourself

And now the other side: what is one thing — however small — that you have managed, coped with, or done well since this began? (example: I am still going to work, I am still loving my family)

What do you wish someone understood?

What do you wish someone understood about what you are going through?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ That there is almost no support for parents
- ☐ That I didn't believe it at first
- ☐ That it affects my body, not just my mind
- ☐ That it feels surreal — like a dream I can't wake from
- ☐ That I feel physically sick at times
- ☐ That I am not the bad person people assume I am
- ☐ Something else

My thoughts: What do you wish people could see that they cannot see from the outside? What part of your experience feels unseen, misunderstood, or judged? If you could say one thing without being interrupted, what would you want others to hear?(example; how could this happen to me, I was a loving parent)

◆ T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f

What do you most want someone to say to you right now — not about the estrangement, but about you as a person? Write it here. Then read it back to yourself as though a trusted friend just said it.

How are you today — really?

How are you today? Not the answer you give other people. The real one.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

Today, honestly, I feel...

What I am not saying to anyone right now is...

The thing that is hardest today is...

◆ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

On your best recent day — even a small one — what did that feel like? Even one hour of feeling like yourself counts. Describe it. (example; excited, happy, normal)

Just write where you are

What you are feeling right now is not an overreaction. It is a completely proportionate response to an extraordinary loss. Today, just write where you are. Nothing more is required. It can even be a list (example: Today feels heavy. "I am tired of carrying this." "I feel stuck.)

Did you know that just writing it down can help your brain come to terms with things. You may not see it like this but over time it will help.

When did your body know?

When did you get confirmation something was wrong — not just delayed or busy, but genuinely wrong? What was the moment your body understood before your mind did?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The moment I knew something was really wrong was...

My body understood before my mind did when (example; tight chest, headaches, confusion)

Looking back, the first real sign was...

◆ T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f

In the time since that moment — what have you shown about who you are? You have kept going. What has that taken? Name it without minimising it. (I am strong, I am resilient, I am still loving, I am courageous). Make it a list if you want to, and repeat them to yourself several times

What have you lost beyond the relationship?

What have you lost beyond the relationship itself?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- The future I had imagined
- The phone calls I expected
- Grandchildren I pictured but may never know
- The person I thought they were
- My role as an active parent
- Family occasions and milestones
- The belief that my family was intact
- Something else

Of the items you chose above, For each one, write a sentence explaining what you think is lost.

For example;

The future I had imagined: that future was where we would have family gathering.

The phone calls I expected: I expected calls for my birthday, or to just chat.

L o o k i n g f o r w a r d

Now look forward rather than back. What do you want to gain — for yourself — now that you know you have to build a different kind of life? What is one thing you want for you? For example: I want to still have family gatherings, I want to learn how to swim, I want to meet new friends.

Who do you hide this from?

Who do you hide this from, and why?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

I hide this from... because...

The person I most wish I could tell is...

Keeping this secret affects me by...

◆ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

Who has shown up for you — even imperfectly — since this began? Write about one person who has tried. (for example: my other children stuck with me, my best friend holds me when I cry)

The question in the dark

What question do you keep returning to, even though you know you may never get a satisfying answer? For example: Did I miss something important? Do they ever think about me?

Write a list of things.

◆ Looking forward

Set the unanswerable question to one side for a moment. What is one question about your own life — not about the estrangement — that you do want to find the answer to? (example; will I ever be able to learn to swim, will I find peace, will I move on to bigger and better things) Write a list.

What the world doesn't understand

Estrangement has been described as grief with no funeral — a loss that has no form the world knows how to respond to. Write a few lines about what you wish people understood about what you are carrying.

For example: I wish people understood that this is not something I can simply get over., I wish people knew that I think about my child every day, even when I don't talk about them.

I wish people...

Which kind of estrangement was yours?

There are two kinds of estrangement — the one that builds slowly, and the one that arrives overnight without warning. Which was yours?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ It built slowly — I saw it coming but hoped it wouldn't
- ☐ It arrived overnight without warning
- ☐ I am still not sure which it was
- ☐ It is still happening — I don't know where it will end
- ☐ Something else

Why ask this question? *It matters because people often judge themselves for how they're feeling without realizing that the nature of the estrangement itself influences the grief.*

Write down whether there were signs, turning points, or moments that stand out to you now?(you can also write NO)

How has the way the estrangement unfolded affected the way you carry it today? Do you understand it a bit more, or are you still in shock.

◆ Turning toward yourself

Whatever kind it was — you have survived the arrival of it. What does that tell you about yourself that perhaps you have not given yourself credit for?(example; that will cope, that you will work hard to move on)

What story have you been telling yourself?

What story have you been telling yourself about why this happened?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ It was my fault
- ☐ I was too strict
- ☐ My child got involved with the wrong people
- ☐ Someone convinced my child to do this
- ☐ My child was manipulated
- ☐ I will never understand why
- ☐ My child needs to find their own way and this is part of it
- ☐ Something else

My thoughts: Which of these explanations do you find yourself returning to most often?

Does it bring you comfort, guilt, anger, confusion, acceptance, or something else?

You do not need to decide whether the story is right or wrong. Simply notice the story your mind returns to when it tries to make sense of what happened. The deeper work is simply becoming aware of the narrative they're carrying and how that narrative affects you.

◆ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

*Now write a different story — not a denial of what happened, but a story in which you are not the villain.
(For Example; I always treated my child with love and respect, I very rarely argued with them)*

What would you want them to know?

If a close friend described to you exactly what you are going through right now, what would you want them to know?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ How I feel hour to hour
- ☐ How it is affecting my body
- ☐ How it is affecting my other relationships
- ☐ How it is affecting my work
- ☐ How surreal and isolating it is
- ☐ That I have no support and nowhere to turn
- ☐ Something else

So once you have selected what resonates with you, answer it. For example; How I feel hour to hour – some days I cry all day, other days I am ok unless someone mentions it.

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

What would that same close friend — who knows you well — say about the kind of parent you were?

You keep going

You picked up this book and started this workbook because you are someone who keeps going. Today, write one sentence about what keeping going means to you right now.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

For me, keeping going means...

What gets me through is...

I am still here because...

Stage 2 Searching

Ambiguous loss is the grief that has no name. The person is alive. The relationship may even have some form of contact — thin, careful, guarded. And yet the parent grieves as though something has died, because something has: the relationship they believed they had, the future they imagined, the role they thought was secure.

The world has no ritual for this. There is no card to send, no casserole on the doorstep, no socially accepted mourning period. Many parents describe feeling as though they are going quietly mad — replaying conversations, scanning for clues, asking why in the middle of the night.

Shame is also present in this stage, often silently. The cultural assumption that estrangement is always the parent's fault means many parents carry a weight of judgement — both from others and from themselves — that is not accurate and not fair.

The exercises in this chapter ask you to name the grief, challenge the shame, and begin to understand that what you are feeling is a proportionate response to a real loss — not evidence of fault.

STAGE 2 AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations for Stage 2: Searching

Return to these whenever you need them. On the hard days especially.

- 1. I am not a bad parent. I am a parent in pain.*
- 2. Shame is not the truth about me. It is a feeling, not a fact.*
- 3. I am allowed to feel this without pretending I am fine.*
- 4. My grief is real even though the world does not have a name for it.*
- 5. I do not have to explain myself to people who have not lived this.*
- 6. There is nothing wrong with me for struggling with this.*
- 7. I am not what the silence says I am.*
- 8. Other people's judgement of my situation is not the truth of my situation.*
- 9. I am worthy of support, kindness, and understanding.*
- 10. The fact that I still love my child is not a weakness. It is who I am.*

STAGE 2 EXERCISES

What does ambiguous loss feel like?

Ambiguous loss is the experience of grieving someone who is still alive — someone who exists in the world but is absent from your life. In your own words, what does that particular quality of loss feel like for you?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ It feels like they died — but without anyone acknowledging it
- ☐ It makes me feel like I am a bad person
- ☐ It doesn't feel true — like it can't be real
- ☐ It feels unfinished — like a wound that can't close
- ☐ It feels like I am frozen while life goes on around me
- ☐ It feels humiliating
- ☐ Something else

Of the answers you selected, what is it about that experience that makes this loss so difficult to carry? Example; lack of recognition and validation, shame, disbelief, no closure, being stuck, embarrassment.

◆ L o o k i n g f o r w a r d

Ambiguous loss is also ambiguous possibility. The relationship is not dead — it is unresolved. What does that leave open for you, even now? Write about the smallest version of hope that still exists other than reconciliation. For example; I may get to meet my grandchildren one day. I hope my child will be happy. I hope he or she will be successful. .

Where does the grief live in your body?

Where does the grief live in your body? Describe what you have been carrying physically.

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ Tight chest
- ☐ Disrupted sleep
- ☐ Low-level exhaustion that rest doesn't touch
- ☐ Stomach knots or nausea
- ☐ Loss of appetite or eating too much
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Crying unexpectedly
- ☐ Physical heaviness — like everything takes more effort
- ☐ Something else

This is about recognising that grief is not just emotional, it can also be physical. What has this loss been costing you physically? It is important to see this.

From the items you selected, write if you intend to do anything about it and if so what. For example; Tight chest; I will start to learn breathing techniques to help with this. Loss of appetite; I will try to plan my meals for the day ahead of time and make them more enticing.

◆ Turning toward yourself

Your body has been carrying this — and also keeping you going. What has your body done well in this time that you have not acknowledged? (for example; I have kept exercising, I have kept my walking routine, I have started to walk the dog more)

When did it surface unexpectedly?

Describe a moment in the past week when the grief surfaced unexpectedly. Not a dramatic moment. An ordinary one — a song, a question someone asked, a family you saw together.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

This week, it surfaced when...

I didn't expect to feel it, but then...

The smallest things still catch me, like...

♦ T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f

Now describe a moment in the same week when you felt something other than grief — even briefly. A laugh, a conversation, a meal, a piece of music. Write about that moment.

Where has shame been showing up?

Shame or guilt keeps parents isolated. In what situations do you feel shame or guilt about the estrangement.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

I don't think it's shame I feel, I think it is...

I feel ashamed when...

The thing I am most afraid people will think is...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

Shame says you are fundamentally flawed. What evidence from your actual life contradicts that? Write three things you have done that a fundamentally flawed person would not have done. (for example; helped a friend, Given my children a great education, taught my sister to swim)

What does the rumination sound like?

What does the rumination sound like for you? The loop your mind runs — the replaying, the re-examining, the questions at 3am. Write it down. Getting it out of your head and onto the page changes its weight.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The thought I keep returning to is...

At 3am my mind goes to...

The loop usually starts with...

◆ L o o k i n g f o r w a r d

Now write about what you would rather your mind spend that same energy on. What would you think about instead? (for example: going on a vacation, getting some new clothes. Visiting my sister)

Write about something else entirely

The mind trying to understand something that cannot be understood is a mind working itself to exhaustion on a problem it was never designed to solve. Today, you are not required to find the answer. Write something — anything — that is not about the estrangement. (for example; what nice things do you have planned for this week. What movie do you love, what's your favourite food etc) make a list;

What does an ordinary day look like now?

What does an ordinary day look like for you now, compared to before? Not the dramatic differences. The small, daily ones. The ones nobody asks about.

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ Long and heavy
- ☐ Sad most of the time
- ☐ Difficult to get through
- ☐ Manageable — until something reminds me
- ☐ OK on the surface but not underneath
- ☐ Noticeably quieter than it used to be
- ☐ Fine some days, terrible others
- ☐ Something else

This is not about making it hard for you, its about identifying what is happening so you can avoid it or focus on how to deal with it better.

So;

Think about why you identified what you did and try to write down the small things that made you feel like that. For example; because I no longer hear my childs voice and I miss it, because some days I have so much work that I am distracted, other days I am not.

◆ L o o k i n g f o r w a r d

Now describe the ordinary day you want — not the one you had before, and not the one you have now. What would a good ordinary day look like, built around who you are becoming? (for example; to hear someone talking about my child and my chest does not tighten, to feel proud of who I am and what I have become)

Where is most of you, most of the time?

You may have found yourself split — partially present in your actual life, and partially still in a state of disbelief. Describe what that split feels like.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

Most of me is still...

The part of me that is present is...

I notice the split most when...

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

The part of you that is present — what is something good and positive it wants? Write about what the present version of you is reaching toward. (for example; to have days where I don't feel sad, to form closer relationships with my other children, to become a better friend)

What has the estrangement cost you socially?

Estrangement is rarely just between two people. What has it cost you in the wider world?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- Relationships with grandchildren
- Relationships with other family members
- Friendships — people who didn't know how to respond
- A sense of belonging in family gatherings
- The ability to talk openly about my life
- My identity as part of an intact family
- Something else

Explain the extent of the estrangement you have identified in the list. For example; do you have any contact with your grandchildren, do you feel you no longer belong at the family dinner and why? Question yourself and don't just let it be. You may be surprised at how hard you are on yourself.

◆ Turning toward yourself

Now name what has stayed intact — or what has quietly grown — in the same period. Something the estrangement did not take. (example; your promotion at work, your ability to reach out to other family members, Your interest in nature)

A letter you will never send

Write a letter to your child that you will never send. Not to persuade, not to explain — just to say what is true for you. **You will not send this. But writing it may change its weight.** For example; I don't understand what happened." "I'm hurting." "I think about you every day."

What gets you through the hardest days?

On the days when the grief is at its heaviest — what actually gets you through? Not what should help. What actually does.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

On the hardest days, what gets me through is...

The thing that helps most, even if it seems small, is...

I have learned that I can cope by...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

What does the fact that you have survived every hard day until now tell you about yourself?

What do you wish you could say out loud?

What is the thing about this experience that you most wish you could say out loud — to anyone — without fear of judgement?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- That I think about them every single day
- That I don't know if I did anything wrong
- That I am furious as well as heartbroken
- That I am relieved sometimes, and then ashamed of the relief
- That I don't know who I am without this role
- That I am afraid this is permanent
- Something else

Many estranged parents are surprised by how much energy goes into hiding certain feelings—especially anger, relief, confusion, resentment, jealousy, or fear. Writing about the thing they cannot say aloud can reduce some of the isolation and shame surrounding it.

*Write your thoughts: **why you don't say it** (is it shame, fear or you just don't know) and **what it feels like to carry it alone** (does it make you feel more lonely or do you feel better by hiding it, is it a bit of self indulgence).*

◆ Turning toward yourself

You just said it — here, privately. How does it feel to have named it, even in this space?

What has surprised you about how you have coped?

Looking back over the time since the estrangement began — what has surprised you about your own capacity to cope?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

I didn't expect to be able to...

What surprised me most about myself was...

I have shown more strength than I knew when...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

Write one sentence about yourself as a person — not as a parent, as a person — that the estrangement has not changed and cannot change.

The grief nobody names

Estrangement grief has no ritual, no social permission, and no end point the world recognises. Write about what it is like to carry a grief that has no name. Bullet points is fine, just express your feelings (loneliness, emptiness, reality checks)

◆ Looking forward

Now write about what naming it — here, in this space — gives you. Even slightly. Even imperfectly. (example; relief, confrontation, realisation)

You are still here

You have been carrying this. And you are still here.? Write about what still being here means to you today.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

Still being here or still being present means...

What keeps me going, underneath everything, is...

The person who benefits most from me staying present is...

Stage 3 *Truth*

Honest self-examination is one of the most difficult things a person can do. It requires the courage to look clearly at oneself — not to confirm the worst, and not to excuse what genuinely deserves examining, but to see as accurately as possible.

This stage is not about blame. It is not an exercise in self-punishment. A parent who arrives here having already destroyed themselves with guilt is not helped by more guilt. What is needed is something different: the ability to look at what happened with clear eyes, take what is genuinely yours to own, and release what was placed on you by others or by circumstances beyond your control.

Many parents carry far more than is theirs to carry. They have been told — by therapists, by cultural narratives, by the person who left — that the estrangement is their fault, entirely and completely. Some of that may be true, in part. Some of it is not true at all.

The exercises in this chapter ask you to examine honestly, take what is yours, and let go what is not.

STAGE 3 AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations for Stage 3: Truth

Return to these whenever you need them. On the hard days especially.

- 1. I can look at myself honestly without destroying myself.*
- 2. I own what is mine. I release what is not.*
- 3. Being able to examine myself honestly is a sign of strength, not weakness.*
- 4. I am not the villain in someone else's story about me.*
- 5. I did the best I could with what I knew and what I had.*
- 6. My mistakes do not cancel my love.*
- 7. I am a flawed person who loved my child genuinely. Both of those things are true.*
- 8. I do not have to carry guilt that was placed on me by someone else.*
- 9. Accountability without self-destruction is possible. I am learning it.*
- 10. I know who I am. That knowledge belongs to me and to no one else.*

STAGE 3 EXERCISES

What is yours to own?

Honest self-examination is not self-destruction. It is the difference between carrying guilt forever and letting go what actually doesn't belong to you. What, if anything, do you believe is yours to own in how this happened?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ The way I communicated — I could have done that differently
- ☐ Times I prioritised other things over the relationship
- ☐ Ways I may have been critical without realising it
- ☐ Patterns I brought from my own upbringing
- ☐ The way I handled conflict
- ☐ I have looked honestly and I don't believe I caused this
- ☐ Something else

Taking responsibility for your part is not the same as taking responsibility for the entire outcome. In looking at your selection can you separate; regret from shame, responsibility from blame, learning from self-punishment So go through your selection and identify which one applies to you. Is it regret or shame or responsibility or blame or self punishment?

◆ Turning toward yourself

*Now name what is **not** yours to own. What has been placed on you that does not belong to you?*

What did you not know then that you know now?

We parent with the understanding we have at the time. What do you know now — about yourself, about relationships, about what children need — that you did not fully understand when your child was growing up?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

What I understand now that I didn't then is (example; how sensitive my child was, how much time I needed to give them)

If I had known what I know now, I would have...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

You did the best you could with what you knew. Write a list of those things you did that you are proud of as a parent (how I always watched their sporting events, how I made sure they had their favourite food)

Where did love get expressed as something else?

Sometimes love gets expressed in ways that don't land as love. Looking back honestly — where might that have happened?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- Worry that came across as criticism
- High expectations that felt like pressure
- Protectiveness that felt like control
- Silence that felt like withdrawal
- Opinions that felt like judgement
- I don't believe this applies to my situation
- Something else

Try and step outside your own perspective and now that you have selected what belongs to you say what you have learnt from this; (example; I learnt that I didn't know how sensitive my child was, I didn't realise how blunt I was, I didn't realise I was saying things like this, I still cant see how my child interpreted that, I see now but didn't realise it at the time). You do not have to address every issue, just in general.

◆ **Turning toward yourself**

The love underneath those expressions was real. Write about the love that was there — the genuine care that drove even the imperfect expressions of it. (I was trying to protect my child, I thought I was avoiding hurting his/her feelings)

What patterns did you bring from your own upbringing?

We all parent partly from how we were parented. What patterns from your own childhood or upbringing might have shaped how you parented — in ways you weren't fully aware of at the time?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

A pattern I brought from my own upbringing was...

I repeated something I said I never would when...

What I was trying to avoid from my own childhood was...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

You broke some patterns too. What did you do differently from how you were raised — consciously or not (never smacked my child, I always asked their opinion, I didn't force them to eat certain food)

The weight you have been carrying

You have been carrying a weight — some of it yours, some of it placed on you by others, some of it simply the weight of loving someone through an impossible situation. Today, write about what you are ready to let go of. It can in the form of a list; (example; The belief that I should have all the answers, The expectation that I can fix this on my own., The habit of replaying the same conversation over and over., The idea that one mistake defines me.)

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

And what do you want to pick up instead? What would you carry in its place?(example; that I am a good person and also a good parent, that I care for my children, that I take responsibility for what I did wrong)

What role did outside factors play?

Estrangements rarely have a single cause. What outside factors do you believe played a role in what happened?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- A partner or spouse who influenced my child's view of me
- Mental health challenges — mine, theirs, or both
- Distance — geographical separation that eroded closeness
- Different values that grew over time
- Addiction — mine, theirs, or someone else's
- Trauma in the family system I didn't fully understand
- Something else

Because many people find some relief when they realize that the estrangement was not created in a vacuum. It emerged within a web of relationships, histories, pressures, personalities, life events, and circumstances. This reflection is to help you step back and see that wider picture.

From what you selected write a brief sentence of what it was. (for example; we had different ideologies and always argued, there was drugs and alcohol from both sides, we rarely spoke when I went away on business trips)

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Naming the factors honestly — without using them as excuses — what does that change about how you understand what happened?(example; parent child relationships are much more complex than I thought, I now understand that its never one thing that causes estrangement, I understand that it wasn't entirely my fault)

What would you do differently?

If you could go back — not to fix everything, but to do one or two specific things differently — what would they be?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The one thing I would do differently is...

The conversation I wish I had handled differently was...

What I would say now, that I did not say then, is...

♦ T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f

That wish for a do-over is itself evidence of love and care. Write about what your answer reveals about the kind of parent you actually were. (example; I still loved my children, I never wanted to hurt them, I am not solely responsible for their life)

What is not yours to carry?

Honest self-examination means taking what is yours — and releasing what is not. What, on reflection, is not yours to carry?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- Their choices as an adult
- The version of me they have decided I am
- Blame placed on me by someone who doesn't know the full story
- Responsibility for another person's pain that I did not cause
- The narrative someone else has constructed
- Something else

Because many estranged parents become trapped in a state where they are carrying far more than their share of the emotional burden. From the answers you chose above; how does this make any difference; (example I realise I cannot influence the choices my child made when he/she became an adult, I realise that I am not the only person in my child's life that has influenced them).

◆ **Turning toward yourself**

Write one thing you are choosing to release today. Not because it does not matter — but because carrying it is not helping you heal. (example; I will let go of my belief I am fully responsible, I let go of my belief that I had to be the perfect parent at all times)

A fair witness to yourself

A fair witness sees clearly — neither harsher than the truth nor kinder than the truth. Write about yourself as a parent, as a fair witness would. Not the worst version. Not the best. The true one. You can write it down in bullet points, (example; I am human, there was no parenting manual, I cant influence everyone, my child is not perfect, we all make mistakes.)

♦ Turning toward yourself

Now write one thing that fair witness would say which is entirely in your defence — something true and good about you as a parent that deserves to be on the record. (example I always showed up for them when they needed me, I made sure they had the best of everything I could afford, they always had good healthy food to eat)

What do you regret?

Regret is not the same as guilt. Regret is honest — it names something without destroying you. What do you genuinely regret?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

What I genuinely regret is...

If I could take one thing back, it would be...

The moment I wish had gone differently was...

♦ T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f

Regret means you care about doing better. What has your regret taught you — about yourself, about relationships, about what matters?(example; its taught me that I am not always right or wrong and that I am only human)

What do you know to be true about yourself as a parent?

Set aside the estrangement for a moment. What do you know — from your own lived experience — to be true about the kind of parent you were?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ I was present and engaged
- ☐ I provided stability and security
- ☐ I expressed love, even if imperfectly
- ☐ I made sacrifices I never spoke about
- ☐ I tried to repair things when they went wrong
- ☐ I kept going even when it was hard
- ☐ Something else

Which one of the above are you most proud of and why?

♦ **Turning toward yourself**

Write that truth down in a single sentence — as a statement of fact, not a defence. Something you know regardless of what anyone else says. (example; I always tried to help my child make the right decisions by encouraging them to look at both sides)

The difference between guilt and shame

Guilt says: I did something wrong. Shame says: I am something wrong. We all do things wrong, so this exercise is designed for you to write these down and I want you to say if they have brought you shame or not. If they have why do you think that.

We often see that admitting guilt is being human and nothing to be ashamed of, so I want you to work out if this is true or not for you. (example; I feel guilty that I never allowed my child to be out after midnight until they were 18 years old. I have no shame for this, I was just protecting my child. I allowed my child to drink alcohol at home, even underaged and I am ashamed of that.)

◆ **Turning toward yourself**

Does all guilt deserve shame? You can see from the above that this is not true, write here why this is important to differentiate and have you done this for yourself (yes or no)

What did you sacrifice that was never acknowledged?

Parents give enormously — often silently, often without recognition. What did you give, sacrifice, or carry for your child that was never acknowledged?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

What I gave that was never acknowledged was...

The sacrifice that cost me most was...

What I never said out loud, but gave anyway, was...

♦ T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f

That giving was real. Write about what it says about you — your love, your commitment, your character — that you gave it anyway. (its important that you give yourself credit when credit is due. Don't think its not humble to acknowledge your positive attributes -go for it!)

What has this process of self-examination shown you?

You have been doing honest, difficult work. What has this process of looking at yourself clearly shown you?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ That I carry more guilt than is accurate or fair
- ☐ That there are things I genuinely regret and want to own
- ☐ That I have been harder on myself than any fair person would be
- ☐ That the estrangement is more complex than one person's fault
- ☐ That I am capable of honest self-reflection — which takes strength
- ☐ Something else

After selecting which applies to you, reflect on what you chose and why. What will you now do with this information. Write a list here; (example; I will stop being so hard on myself, I will continue to look at myself in other areas of my life,)

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

What do you want to do with what you have seen? Not a grand resolution — one small, honest step. (example; talk to someone about specific things I have taken responsibility for to understand why, to try and see the other persons point of view more often)

I own what is mine. I release what is not.

Write about what those two sentences mean for you specifically — in your situation, with your history. What is yours? What is not yours? Write it as clearly as you can.

What I want to take ownership of is: (example; my ability to see how the other person thinks, my neediness)

What is not mine : (example; its all my fault, I was a bad parent, I am a burden to my children)

Stage 4 Choices

Every parent who has experienced estrangement knows the patterns. The checking — of social media, of the inbox, of the phone. The rehearsing of conversations that may never happen. The scanning of family members for news. The decisions made with one eye always on the person who left.

These patterns are not signs of weakness. They were the mind's attempt to stay connected, to remain hopeful, to avoid the unbearable alternative. They made sense when they formed.

But at some point, they begin to cost more than they give. The energy spent checking is energy not spent living. The rehearsed conversations keep the pain fresh. The waiting puts life on hold in a way that does not serve the parent, and does not — in truth — serve the absent child either.

This stage is not about giving up hope. It is about recognising which patterns are keeping you stuck, understanding why they formed, and beginning — gently, without self-punishment — to choose differently.

STAGE 4 AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations for Stage 4: Choices

Return to these whenever you need them. On the hard days especially.

- 1. I am not stuck because I am weak. I am learning a different way.*
- 2. I can choose differently today than I chose yesterday.*
- 3. The love underneath my patterns is real. The patterns themselves can change.*
- 4. I am allowed to stop doing things that hurt me.*
- 5. Every small step away from the pain counts. Even one step.*
- 6. I do not have to keep searching for an answer that may not exist.*
- 7. Letting go of the search is not giving up. It is choosing myself.*
- 8. My energy belongs to my life, not only to this loss.*
- 9. I am more than this estrangement. I always have been.*
- 10. Today I choose to put my attention somewhere it can actually grow.*

STAGE 4 EXERCISES

What patterns keep pulling you back?

Some patterns feel like love — checking for messages, rehearsing conversations, scanning for signs. Which of these do you recognise in yourself?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- Checking their social media or online presence
- Rehearsing what I would say if they contacted me
- Sending messages I know may not be welcome
- Asking other family members for news about them
- Making decisions based on what they might think
- Keeping myself available in case they reach out
- Something else

You have already done the hard work by identifying the patterns you have. Now you need to look at them from a different point of view. They may feel like love, but the effects are different. Make some small suggestions as to how you can begin to overcome these patterns; (for example; stop sending unwelcome messages to them and start writing down that message in a journal instead)

Briefly, what are some things you will do or not do:

◆ Looking forward

What would you do if you redirected even a fraction of it toward your own life? (example; start planning some new activities)

Why did the pattern make sense at the time?

Most patterns you identified in the previous question keep us stuck, but they made sense when they formed — they were strategies for coping, connecting, or surviving. Picking one of your patterns:

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

This pattern made sense because at the time...

I started doing this because I believed...

What I was trying to achieve by doing this was...

♦ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

That strategy served a purpose once? And what would it mean to choose a different strategy now?

What are you still searching for?

Many parents stay stuck in a search — for an explanation, for a sign, for a way back in. What are you still searching for?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ An explanation that makes sense of what happened
- ☐ Proof that they still think about me
- ☐ A way to reach them that might work
- ☐ Someone to tell me it wasn't my fault
- ☐ A sign that reconciliation is still possible
- ☐ I am not sure — the search has become a habit
- ☐ Something else

*This question is really about **unfinished business in the mind**. Now that you have had an opportunity to see things more clearly, is this still something you are looking for or is it deeper. Is it love, forgiveness, hope?*

Using the ones selected above write why you are still searching for that.

◆ Looking forward

What would it mean to stop searching — not to give up, but to put the energy of the search somewhere it can actually grow?(to put effort into your relationship with your other children or your friends, to start doing things you love, like cooking more, learning to write poetry)

Letting go of the search

Letting go of the search is not giving up on your child. It is choosing yourself. Write about the difference between those two things — as you understand it today.

For example; Giving up on my child doesn't mean I stopped loving them. Letting go of the search means stopping the constant need to solve what I cannot solve.

I can hold hope for reconciliation without spending every day looking for signs that it will happen."

Choosing myself means allowing my life to continue, even while I miss them.

So, for Me, letting go of the search doesn't mean: (you can use bullet points)

◆ Turning toward yourself

Write about what choosing yourself — in one specific, practical way — would look like this week. For example; how would you feel if you went and had a spa? Or went to your favourite restaurant?

What does the waiting cost you?

Many estranged parents live in a state of waiting — for contact, for reconciliation, for resolution. What does the waiting cost you?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The waiting costs me...*(example; my time for my other children, it keeps me feeling sad)*

What I put on hold while I wait is...

The version of myself I can't fully be while I'm waiting is...

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

What would you start — or return to — if you decided the waiting was over? Not because reconciliation is impossible, but because your life cannot wait for it. (example; return to my studies, return to being more available to my friends. Return to spending more time with my animals)

What keeps you stuck most?

Looking honestly at your situation — what is the thing that keeps you most stuck?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- Hope that things will change if I just wait long enough
- Fear that moving forward means giving up
- Not knowing what I would do with myself if I stopped focusing on this
- Guilt — I feel I don't deserve to move forward until this is resolved
- The belief that my happiness depends on theirs
- Something else

Staying stuck is something we often do, without realising it. . Selecting the belief above that is number one for you, what do you think you need to do, to let this go (example; I need to go to a therapist, I need to talk more to my friends. I need to journal more, I need to learn to love myself more).

◆ Looking forward

*Now that you have explored how to let go of a belief you are stuck on, what **action** are you going to take to show yourself that you do not have to remain stuck on that belief. (Example; take more notice of my friends advise, buy a journal and write every day.)*

What does contact or its absence feel like today?

On a practical, daily level — what does the absence of contact feel like right now? Not the grief of it. The day-to-day reality.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

On a normal day, the absence feels like...

When I see something that reminds me of them, I...

The hardest time of day or week is still...

♦ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

What is one thing you could do to make that particular time of day or week easier for yourself? Something practical and kind. (example; keep myself busy, organise coffee with my friends etc)

The story you keep telling yourself

We all carry a story about what happened and why. Write the story you have been telling yourself. You can write it in bullet form if that is easier.

Then ask: is this the only version? If not, what do you think the other version is from your estranged child;s view point?

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Write a third version of the same events — one that is equally possible, but from a friend's point of view looking in. Is it as bad as you think?

What are you afraid moving forward would mean?

Sometimes what keeps us stuck is not the pattern itself but what we are afraid moving on would mean. What are you afraid it would say about you — or about your love for your child?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

I am afraid that moving forward would mean...(example; that I don't love my child anymore, that I am selfish, I don't see it as a reflection of me)

The thing I worry it says about me if I let go is...(example; am I a bad person? Do I deserve this?)

What I want people to understand is that moving forward doesn't mean...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

Write the truth: moving forward is not a betrayal. Write what it actually is — in your own words, for yourself. Use point form if its easier. (example; its accepting that relationships are complex, it means no one person is perfect etc)

What would moving forward actually look like?

Moving forward does not mean forgetting or giving up. What would it actually look like for you?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- Thinking about them less often throughout the day
- Making plans without factoring in the possibility of contact
- Investing more energy in the relationships I do have
- Pursuing something I have been putting off
- Feeling genuinely okay — not just functioning
- Something else

Often we have no idea what "moving forward" would actually look like in real life. The purpose of this reflection is to make the future more concrete and less frightening

Once you have selected what looks good to you from the above list, choose the one that stands out the most. Ask yourself why that particular one is so important to you. (example; it will help me make better decisions for myself, it will reflect on my self love and ability to love others, it will show me that my own priorities matter)

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Pick one thing from your answer. Write about one small step toward it you could take this week.

Your energy belongs to your life

Your love for your child is real and it will not disappear. But your energy — the daily, finite resource of attention and effort — belongs to your life. Write about where you want that energy to go. (example; I want my energy to go into making me a better person, I want my energy to go into learning new skills etc) Point form is ok, but try to think of at least five things.

What have you learned about yourself through this?

This stage of the journey — looking at patterns, understanding what keeps you stuck — is difficult work. What have you learned about yourself through doing it?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ I am more self-aware than I gave myself credit for
- ☐ I have been harder on myself than I deserved
- ☐ I have more capacity to change than I thought
- ☐ I understand now why I did things I regret
- ☐ I can see the difference between love and the patterns love created
- ☐ Something else

You have gained insight, not answers. If you could speak to the version of yourself who first began this journey, what would you tell them now? (example; "I would tell myself that I am not as broken as I think I am, or I would tell myself that understanding my part does not mean carrying all the blame, or I would tell myself that I can survive this.) Give yourself two more examples specifically about you.

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

What do you want to do differently — starting now — based on what you have learned? Just list two things, no matter how small.

What does the relationship mean to you now?

Not what it meant before. Not what you hope it will mean in the future. What does it mean to you now — as it actually is today?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

Right now, the relationship means...*(example; I have to watch from a distance, that I still feel the same but accept it has changed)*

What I hold onto from it is*(Example; that it doesn't mean it is broken, its just changed. Or, its important to be happy than be right)*

What I have had to accept about it is...*(Example; that there is more to relationships than just blood, that everyone can find their own happiness)*

♦ Turning toward yourself

The love inside that meaning is real and it is yours. Write about how you carry it — not as a wound, but as something that belongs to you. (Example; I still carry it as a parents love for their child or its more an adult-adult love)

A letter to the pattern

Write a letter to the habit, belief, or pattern that has kept you stuck.

Thank it for what it was trying to do. Perhaps it was trying to keep you connected. Perhaps it was trying to prevent another loss. Perhaps it was trying to find an answer.

Then tell it gently that you no longer need it to carry that responsibility.

What are you choosing to trust instead?

I am learning a different way

You are not stuck because you are weak. You are learning a different way of carrying this. Write about what that different way is beginning to look like for you.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The different way I am learning is...*(example; to let go of old beliefs, to understand things do not have to be done my way etc)*

What choosing differently looks like for me is...*(example hard work, difficult to accept, that I need to do this to move on)*

I notice I am beginning to...*(understand about myself, realise there are not always answers, acceptance without justification is important)*

Stage 5 Reclaiming

There is a life waiting for you. Not the one you had before the estrangement — that life has changed, and trying to restore it exactly would be to miss something important. Not a consolation prize, or a smaller version of the life you imagined. A life that is genuinely and fully yours — built from who you actually are, what you actually value, and what you actually want.

This stage is about reclaiming. Reclaiming your identity beyond the role that was disrupted. Reclaiming your time, your energy, your capacity for joy. Reclaiming the right to want things for yourself — things that have nothing to do with your child and do not depend on whether the estrangement resolves.

Joy is not a betrayal of your love. It is evidence of your healing. A parent who begins to rebuild is not abandoning their child — they are refusing to let the estrangement take everything.

The exercises in this chapter ask you to look forward — at what you want, who you are becoming, and what the life that is waiting might actually look like.

STAGE 5 AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations for Stage 5: Reclaiming

Return to these whenever you need them. On the hard days especially.

- 1. I deserve a life that is genuinely and fully mine.*
- 2. Joy is not a betrayal of my love. It is evidence of my healing.*
- 3. I am allowed to want things for myself.*
- 4. The life I am building is real and it matters.*
- 5. I am not waiting any more. I am arriving.*
- 6. I am someone with a future, not only a past.*
- 7. What I am becoming is worth paying attention to.*
- 8. I can love my child and also choose myself. Both are true.*
- 9. My happiness does not depend on their choices.*
- 10. I am still the parent. I am also so much more than that.*

STAGE 5 EXERCISES

What is the life that is waiting?

Not the life you had before. Not a consolation prize. The life that is genuinely and fully yours — the one that has been waiting while you were carrying this. Write a list of what it looks like.

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Write one thing you could do this week to take one step toward that life. Not a plan. One step.

What do you want for yourself?

Not for your child. Not for your family. For you. What do you actually want?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ More close friendships
- ☐ A better or different direction in my work or purpose
- ☐ More travel or new experiences
- ☐ Time that is genuinely mine
- ☐ Better physical health
- ☐ Something creative
- ☐ To feel settled and at peace
- ☐ Something else

Prioritize this list and then select the top three items and in point form write what you will get out of this option.

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Pick one. Write about what steps you will be taking to make this happen

What does reclaiming your identity look like?

Estrangement can shrink your sense of who you are to the role that has been disrupted. Who are you beyond this story? What parts of yourself are you reclaiming?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

Beyond this, I am someone who...

A part of myself I am reclaiming is...

Something I used to love that I am returning to is...

♦ Turning toward yourself

Write about who you are becoming — not who you were before, and not who the estrangement made you. Who you are becoming and where do you think you will be in 5 years time.

The difference between escaping and arriving

There is a difference between running away from the pain and moving toward something real. **Running away is often still organized around the estrangement. Moving toward is organized around life.**

One example is constantly looking at your estranged child on social media is part of you trying to run away from the pain. Spending more time with your friends is moving towards a better life. Give three examples of what you did to 'run away' from the pain, and what you are doing now to move towards your life.

◆ Looking forward

If your life was no longer organized around escaping pain, fixing the estrangement, finding answers, or waiting for change, what would you be moving toward instead? You may have written the answer above. If so how does that make you feel?

What has survived the estrangement?

Not everything has been lost. What has survived — or even grown — through this experience?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ A clearer sense of who I am
- ☐ Deeper relationships with people who showed up for me
- ☐ Greater compassion — for myself and others
- ☐ A different set of priorities
- ☐ Resilience I did not know I had
- ☐ A creative or personal project I would not otherwise have pursued
- ☐ Something else

How does this help you deal with the estrangement? It will still be hard and you will still have sad days, but list five things you can now do, so that the pain is not so intense. (example; I can now send my child a text on his birthday, and not expect a response)

♦ Turning toward yourself

Write about one of those things in more detail. How did it survive or grow? What does having it mean to you now?

What does joy feel like now?

Joy may have felt like a stranger for a while. Is it returning? What does it feel like when it arrives now?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

When joy arrives now, it feels...

The last time I felt genuinely light was...

What I notice about joy now that I did not before is...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

Joy is not a betrayal of your love. It is evidence of your healing. Write that in your own words and repeat it to yourself as a mantra.

The life that is entirely yours

Write about somethings you are building that are new — however small — that belongs entirely to you. List as many as you can.

Who is in your life now?

Who is genuinely in your life right now — people who show up, who care, who are present? Not who you wish were there. Who actually is.

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- A partner or spouse
- Close friends who have stayed
- Other children or family members
- A community — faith, interest, neighbourhood
- A therapist or support person
- Colleagues or people connected to my work or purpose
- Something else

Of the ones you chose, which ones helped you move on. Write their names and next to it, say one thing they did that you are grateful for, no matter how small.

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Pick one of those relationships. Write about what investing more fully in it would look like — and what it might give you.

What are you looking forward to?

Name something you are genuinely looking forward to. Not as a distraction. As a real thing that belongs to your life.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

Something I am genuinely looking forward to is...

A plan I have made for myself that I am glad about is...

Something small I am anticipating with pleasure is...

♦ **T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f**

The ability to look forward is a sign of healing. Write about what having something to look forward to gives you.

What does turning back toward your life look like?

Your life did not end when the relationship did. It continued, quietly, waiting for you to turn back toward it. Write about what turning back toward your own life looks like in practice.

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ Giving more attention to my other children or grandchildren
- ☐ Joining a gym, class, or club
- ☐ Taking better care of my own health
- ☐ Planning a trip or something to look forward to
- ☐ Reconnecting with friends I have neglected
- ☐ Finding work or a project that is mine
- ☐ Something else

Of the ones you selected, write how it helps you now and what emotion does it give you.

What would it mean to stop being the thread?

Stop being the thread. The love can stay. The effort of holding it all together can be set down. What would it mean to no longer be the thread?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ Free — genuinely, surprisingly free
- ☐ A relief I would feel guilty about
- ☐ Regret — I would miss the role
- ☐ Strange — I wouldn't know what to do
- ☐ Scary — that thread was also keeping me connected to them
- ☐ Something else

Think about the things you did to keep holding it all together. List some examples;

◆ **L o o k i n g f o r w a r d**

Write about one relationship in your life — other than the estranged one — that you would like to invest more of yourself in.

What has been waiting for you?

What has been waiting for you while you were waiting?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ A place I have always wanted to go or live
- ☐ A project or creative work that is mine
- ☐ A relationship I have been neglecting
- ☐ A version of myself I have not yet lived
- ☐ I don't know yet — but I want to find out
- ☐ Something else

Of the ones you selected, list two things you are doing to achieve it.

Name one thing you actually want

Today, name one thing you actually want. Not for your child. Not for your family. For you.

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ More close friendships
- ☐ A better or different job
- ☐ More travel
- ☐ Time to myself — genuinely mine
- ☐ Better physical health
- ☐ Something creative
- ☐ To feel settled and at peace
- ☐ Something else

Of the ones you chose, what do you want to get out of it. (For example; more travel will fulfill a childhood dream, or better physical health will mean I will enjoy playing with my grandchildren more.)

Something that is entirely yours

For a long time, estrangement may have taken up more space than you wanted it to.

What deserves more space in your life now?

A person.

A passion.

A dream.

A part of yourself.

Write about what you would like to make room for.

What does it feel like when you can see that you can have a happy life now?

What does it feel like when joy arrives now?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ Good — genuinely good
- ☐ A surprise — I didn't expect to feel it
- ☐ Important — a sign I am healing
- ☐ Rewarding — like I earned it
- ☐ Still tinged with guilt, if I am honest
- ☐ Natural — more and more like my old self
- ☐ Something else

Write two things that you need to be careful of, so that you do not slip back into old ways or habits that could effect this

Stage 6 *Peace*

You have arrived at the final stage of this workbook — and in some sense, the final stage of this particular chapter of your healing journey.

Done Waiting does not mean done loving. The love is still there — it is simply no longer the thing around which your whole life turns. You can love your child quietly, from a distance, without putting your life on hold waiting for them to return. That love is yours to keep. No estrangement can take it from you.

This stage is about integration. The experiences you have been through — the shock, the grief, the honest examination, the recognition of patterns, the rebuilding — they have changed you. Not broken you. Changed you.

Many parents who reach this stage describe feeling, for the first time, genuinely themselves. Not the self they were before the estrangement — that person has grown. Not the self who was defined by the pain. The self who has survived, examined, rebuilt, and chosen to live fully.

The exercises in this chapter ask you to take stock of where you are, recognise how far you have come, and name the life that is now — actually, really — yours.

STAGE 6 AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations for Stage 6: Peace

Return to these whenever you need them. On the hard days especially.

- 1.** *I am not the same person who began this journey. I am stronger.*
- 2.** *I carry my love quietly, without waiting. It is mine to keep.*
- 3.** *I am done waiting for my life to begin. It is happening now.*
- 4.** *I stood in the fire and I did not break.*
- 5.** *Peace is not the absence of pain. It is choosing my life anyway.*
- 6.** *I know who I am. Nothing that has happened has changed that.*
- 7.** *I am still the parent. That will never change.*
- 8.** *The ground beneath me is solid. I built it myself.*
- 9.** *I have survived the hardest thing. I can survive anything.*
- 10.** *My story is not over. The best of it may still be ahead.*

STAGE 6 EXERCISES

What is the most important thing you understand now?

What is the single most important thing you understand now that you did not understand when you began this journey?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The most important thing I understand now is...

I could not have understood this at the beginning because...

What changed my understanding was...

What has been hardest to accept?

What has been the hardest thing to accept about your situation?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ That it happened to me — I never thought it would
- ☐ The effect on the rest of my family
- ☐ The guilt and shame I carried
- ☐ That I may never get an explanation
- ☐ That reconciliation may never come
- ☐ That I wasted time waiting instead of living
- ☐ Something else

Rank your answer from most important and explain why the one at the top is the hardest thing you have come to terms with, and why you think that.

♦ Turning toward yourself

Write about how you feel with this acceptance, and how it is displayed in your life now.

What do you understand about your grief now?

What do you now understand about your own grief that you did not understand before?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- That it was real — and that it mattered
- Why it hurt as deeply as it did
- Why my body was affected, not just my mind
- Why some of the things I did were not working
- That grief is not linear — it moves in waves
- That healing is possible without resolution
- That I was not alone, even when I felt I was
- Something else

Other than read this book and do this workbook, what other things did you do on this journey that has helped you understand these things (example; talk with friends, went to counselling, joined a facebook group with like people etc).

Which one was the hardest for you to understand.

What one thing will you do differently from today?

What is the one thing you are going to do differently from today? Not a list. One thing. The most important one.

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- ☐ Stop beating myself up
- ☐ Give myself more credit for how far I have come
- ☐ Take a genuine step toward something I want
- ☐ Be more present for the people who are here
- ☐ Let go of something I have been holding on to
- ☐ Commit to my own healing rather than waiting for theirs
- ☐ Something else

Chose one or more and write how you will achieve this in a practical way. (example; I will join a group of like-minded people, I will learn techniques on how to deal with problems in a different way etc, I will say affirmations every day, I will keep a gratitude journal)

Complete this sentence honestly

Complete this sentence, as honestly as you can, from wherever you are right now.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

My life from here will...

What I am most looking forward to is...

I am done waiting for...

If they come back — what would you want?

If they come back — and the person who comes back is not the child you lost, but someone grown and changed — what would you want from that beginning?

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- A plan or understanding of how we navigate it together
- To get to know who they are now, gradually — without expectations
- No expectations — just presence
- Honesty, even if it is hard
- Nothing specific — I just want them back
- I have stopped waiting for this — and that is OK too
- Something else

It's important to realise that things cannot go back to the way they were, because you have both had different experiences now. Of all the ones you selected above, which one is going to be the hardest for you and why? Which one will be the easiest and why?

Love without suspension

You do not have to stop loving your child in order to keep living.

What might it look like to carry that love with you, while continuing to build a life of your own?
(Example: Making plans for the future without waiting to see whether they contact me. It would mean allowing myself to enjoy a holiday, a meal, or a happy day without feeling guilty.)

Write three things you intend to do without having your child in your life:

A decision that was entirely yours

The day you stop making decisions with one eye on the person who left is the day you start truly living the life that was always yours. Write about a recent decision you made that was entirely yours.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

A recent decision I made that was entirely mine was...

What made it different from before is...

Making it felt like...

A letter to your earlier self

What do you know now — about grief, about yourself, about what you are capable of — that the person at the beginning of this journey did not know?

Write it as a letter to that earlier version of yourself. Tell yourself what you can expect, how you can cope with it and why its important.

I am done waiting

Write about what those words mean to you today. Not as a resolution. As a description of where you actually are.

What has surprised you about who you have become?

What has surprised you about who you have become through this? **Chose one only.**

Select all that apply — circle your answer(s):

- How strong I am — stronger than I knew
- How much self-examination I am actually capable of
- How much I have changed, and how little I miss the old version
- That I can love someone and still choose myself
- How much I can hurt — and still keep going
- Something else

Why did you chose that one, and what have you specifically done along the way to list that one as the most important one to you? .

How do you carry your love now?

The love stays. It belongs to you — it does not require anything from them to be real. How do you carry your love for your child now? Has it changed in how it feels?

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

The love I carry for them now feels...

What has changed about how I love them is...

Loving them from a distance, without waiting, now feels...

♦ T u r n i n g t o w a r d y o u r s e l f

Write about the love you have given in your life more broadly — to others, to yourself, to the life you are building. Do you feel its grown, or just changed, or nothing has changed, you still love just the same..

An ordinary Tuesday now

Write about an ordinary Tuesday in your life today. Not the extraordinary days. The ordinary ones. What does a regular Tuesday look like now?

What has shifted in you?

You are not the same person who opened this book or app. Write about what has shifted — even if only slightly, even if you cannot fully name it yet.

Sentence starters — complete whichever feels right:

What has shifted in me is...

I notice I am different now when...

The person I was at the beginning would be surprised to know...

What would you say to a parent at the beginning?

Looking back, what has surprised you most about this experience? It might be something about grief, healing, yourself, other people, or what it means to keep loving someone who is absent.

So how would you tell this to a person who tells you the pain they are experiencing from their estranged child. What would you tell them about your own journey. Bullet points is fine.

Milestone Exercises

Some dates hurt more than others. Your child's birthday. Mother's Day or Father's Day. Christmas. These exercises are written specifically for the days before those dates arrive — to help you prepare, rather than be ambushed.

Use these exercises in the days before each significant date. You do not have to wait until you feel ready. Writing before the hard day is what helps.

M i l e s t o n e E x e r c i s e

*Mother's Day / Father's Day is approaching **Next Week***

Mother's Day / Father's Day is approaching next week. For many estranged parents, this is one of the hardest days of the year — a day the world celebrates something you are carrying in silence.

Start to prepare something for that day now, so you will be occupied and not taken by surprise. Don't allow yourself to catastrophise about it. Acknowledge it will be hard — and also tell yourself you will be OK. You will cope.

Write what you have decided to do on the day so you are not ambushed by it. Maybe get up and prepare a special breakfast for yourself. You could organise to meet with some friends or other relatives during the day. Grab a movie with a friend. Play a round of golf.

What I am doing next week on Mothers/Fathers day is:

M i l e s t o n e E x e r c i s e

***Tomorrow** is Mother's Day / Father's Day*

Tomorrow is Mother's Day / Father's Day. You are a parent. That does not change because someone is not in contact with you.

Today, write one true and positive thing about the parent you have been — and the parent you still are. Earmark this page so you will see it tomorrow morning. Begin tomorrow by reading it. Look at yourself in the mirror and say: I am worthy. Then get on with the day that you planned.

One true and positive thing about the parent I have been.

*Your child's birthday is **next week**.*

Your child's birthday is in a week. Write about how you used to plan and celebrate this day. Now write what you are planning this time — knowing things are different.

Prepare for the day deliberately. Keep yourself occupied on the day. A prepared day is easier to accept than one that arrives without a plan.

What I am planning to do on this day.

Tomorrow is your child's birthday

Tomorrow is your child's birthday. You do not have to feel okay about this. You do not have to feel anything in particular. Whatever you feel is the right response to a genuinely hard day.

I hope you have planned something kind for yourself. And when you think of them tomorrow — and you will — that is love. It is not a step backwards.

You have already made plans for tomorrow now what is something kind you can do for yourself tomorrow. .

Christmas is approaching next week

The holidays are approaching. Write about what you would normally be planning for. Now write what you are planning this year.

Look honestly at the difference — and ask yourself why it is different, and what that says about where you are. You don't have to shrink the day. You can choose to make it yours.

What I am planning this year.

M i l e s t o n e E x e r c i s e

Tomorrow is Christmas

Tomorrow is Christmas. You have survived every previous version of this day. You will survive this one.

Today, write about one thing you are grateful for — something that has nothing to do with the estrangement.

One thing I am genuinely grateful for today.

M i l e s t o n e E x e r c i s e

Thanksgiving is approaching

Thanksgiving is approaching. It is a day built around the idea of family gathering — which makes it one of the harder days in the year for an estranged parent.

Write about what you are planning for this Thanksgiving. Who will you be with? What will you do? If you will be alone or in a smaller gathering than before, write about how you will make it yours — not a reduced version of what it was, but something that belongs to you now.

What I am planning this Thanksgiving.

M i l e s t o n e E x e r c i s e

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. You do not have to perform gratitude you do not feel. But you are still here, still going, still choosing to do the work — and that is something.

Write one honest thing you are grateful for. It does not have to be big. It just has to be true.

One honest thing I am grateful for.

M i l e s t o n e E x e r c i s e

A grandchild's birthday is approaching

A grandchild's birthday or milestone is approaching. Write something about them. Just them — who they are, what you know of them, what you hope for them.

What I will be doing on that day

M i l e s t o n e E x e r c i s e

Tomorrow is an important day for your grandchild

Tomorrow is an important day for your grandchild. Write a few lines to them — privately, here, just for you. Tell them who you are and how much you love them.

This is not a letter you will send. But it is real. And it belongs to you.

Dear

A f i n a l w o r d

You reached the last page.

That means something. Not everyone does. Many people buy a workbook, open it with good intentions, and put it down after the first few pages. You kept going — through the hard questions, the honest ones, the ones that asked you to look at yourself clearly and the ones that asked you to look forward.

That is not a small thing.

The work you have done in these pages will not disappear when you close the cover. The things you named, the patterns you examined, the truths you wrote down — they are part of you now in a different way. Writing makes things real. You have made some important things real.

You are still the parent. That has not changed and it never will. But you are also more than that — more than the role that was disrupted, more than the grief that arrived without warning, more than the silence that followed. You are someone who chose to do the work. That matters.

If reconciliation comes, you will be ready for it — not because you waited, but because you healed. And if it does not come, you will have built something that belongs entirely to you regardless. A life. A self. A way of carrying the love that does not require you to put everything else down.

Go gently. Come back to these pages whenever you need them. And remember — on the hard days especially — that you are not alone in this. Millions of parents carry what you carry. You found your way here. That already says something important about who you are.

You are still the parent. That never changes.

— L.M. Harwood

Lindas-books.com

Stilltheparent.com
