

SELF-EMPATHY JOURNAL



SHULAMIT BER LEVTOV, MA, RSW, CCTP



Self-empathy Journal

Introduction



I'm Shulamit Ber Levtov, MA, RSW, CCTP, the Entrepreneur's Therapist.

I work with women business owners to care for their mental and emotional wellbeing in an era of relentless stressors that can make you lose your shit on the daily.

Mental and emotional well-being sets the foundation for sustainable success and enables you to show up fully as your CEO-self in your business.

It is my wish that this journal will help you be kind to yourself, thereby reducing your stress and improving your mental and emotional well-being.

How to use this journal

To engage with this journal, choose a space where you will be comfortable writing, and where you are not likely to be interrupted. You will want to have a pen handy, and perhaps some extra blank paper or a journal.

You can give yourself between 20 and 60 minutes (or more) to work through this journal. How long it takes depends on how long you want to spend on each step. As you repeat this exercise over time, you will find some situations will take longer to work on than others. You will also notice that, in general, you will become faster at it. Perhaps in time, you will come up with a shortened version you can use on the fly.

Writing out what you notice and reading it back to yourself, especially out loud, is a helpful way to stay present to your experience without getting overwhelmed.

It's a good idea to do this exercise for the first time when you're feeling more on the positive side. That way you are starting from a stronger place, emotionally.

You might find that it's helpful to move around between each step as needed, or even set up your pen and journal so you can stand and write. Steps 7 and 9 are optional, and can help you take your self-empathy practice deeper if you want to. If you're short on time or energy, or feel complete without them, you can skip them and still benefit from this process.

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What's the matter with stress?

Stress is the body's response to external threat or demand. This is adaptive. The problem is when we are constantly stressed with no time to recover. The net result of chronic stress is a dysregulated nervous system.

In other words, it feels like your nerves are fried... or you cry at the drop of a hat... or you're on your last nerve (all the time)... or maybe you can't sleep. These are all effects of a nervous system on overdrive.

Your nervous system needs three things to help it get back to normal: its energy for mobilizing your body needs to be discharged, and the mind-body needs to be soothed and nourished.

What does self-empathy have to do with stress reduction?

Research has shown that negative emotional experiences are as hard on a person as injuries to the body. One of the ways we make stressful situations worse is by judging and criticizing ourselves.

Not only does the situation stress us out, but we also beat ourselves up, sometimes for breaking down or feeling bad, other times for things we think we may have done wrong, or any number of other reasons.

Research has also shown that being kind to yourself soothes the nervous system and alleviates the stress response. It also has demonstrated that accepting what's happening emotionally—called “labelling” the emotions—has a calming effect. These two things sound good, but in my experience, both personal and professional, it's easier said than done to be kind and accepting toward yourself.

If you're like me, you may need some coaching on the *how* of self-kindness and self-acceptance. That's why I wrote this journal: to offer you some concrete support for the actual step-by-step process of self-kindness and self-acceptance.

Judging and categorizing is a healthy and normal function of the human brain. When driving, for example, it helps us know when to stop and when to go. It helps us know what's safe and keeps us away from danger.

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The problem is that the mind can get out of hand when sorting things into categories of safety and danger, right and wrong, good and bad, in order to keep us safe. This kind of categorizing does not serve human connection, either with self or with other. When you categorize some of your thoughts or other parts of you as good or bad, you go to war with yourself. You shame, judge and criticize yourself, when what you need in order to calm yourself and get clear on your next steps in a situation is a way to listen to the whole of the situation, “good” and “bad,” in order to find a third way that takes the whole into account.

This self-empathy journal provides you with a way to begin to explore listening to the whole of a situation in a way that starts with thoughts and judging and ends with what really matters. Once you know what really matters to you, it opens space for the action steps to come. Sometimes even the clarity alone is all the relief that’s needed, and you can move forward into life firmly anchored in your sense of what really matters, your deepest values. You feel calmer and less stressed, and can think more clearly.

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I. Call the situation to mind. Describe it briefly.

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2. Notice and describe what's happening in your body (use sensations list at back of e-book).

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3. Note the emotions you are feeling, using presence language (and the emotions list at the back of this e-book): “I’m noticing *something in me* feels _____.”

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4. Acknowledge the emotions and sensations.

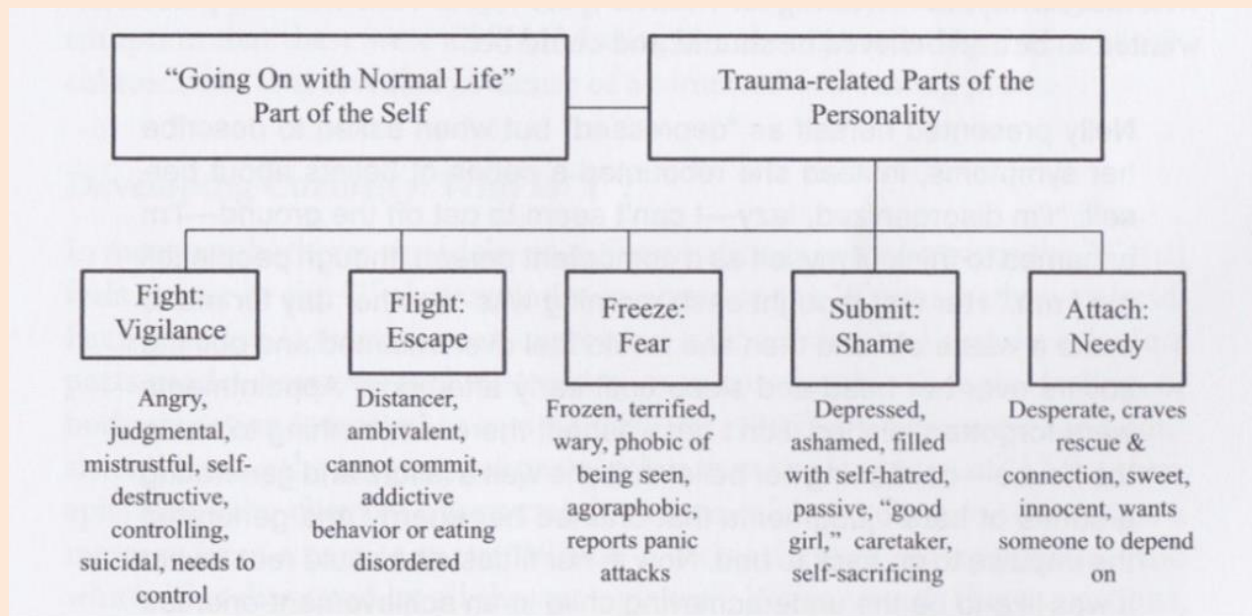
Write out your acknowledgments, then set down your pen and paper and say it to yourself out loud.

For example: “I’m acknowledging that *something in me* feels warm and tense.”

Write your acknowledgement(s) here:

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5. Now take a moment to notice what parts might be here, and note them.



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6. Self-empathy: being your own best friend

Imagine that *something in you* is like a good friend confiding in you. Refer to the parts of you that have the emotions thoughts you wrote in steps 4 and 5, and respond to them the same way you would to that good friend who's upset and telling you about it.

Remember to be kind. You can say things like: "Of course you feel that way." "No wonder, after all you've been through!" or "Yes, this is a difficult moment for you."

Write your statements here then read them to yourself.

After you have read yourself your statements, write what you are noticing here: (this can include thoughts, emotions, sensations or anything else you notice)

Now you might like to go on to step 7 or skip to step 8.

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7. Self-empathy part two: noticing and describing what is wanted.

This is an optional step.

Maybe you can sense a longing in there? Is *something in you* wanting, or wishing for, or dreaming of something?

You might like to describe what this longing feels like, using sensation words.

Your insides might let you know what's not wanted (judgments), or what is wanted (needs). Either one is OK. You can keep your ears tuned for need words (see list at the end of this e-book), and you can also offer yourself needs guesses, and see if they feel inside like the right fit.

Write what you are noticing here: (this can include thoughts, emotions, sensations or anything else you notice)

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8. Take time to receive and protect what has come.

You can put down your pen and paper, pause, and sit quietly.

You might like to thank your insides, if that feels right. After a time, you can turn your awareness to whatever it is you want to do next.

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9. Identifying action

This is an optional step.

Maybe there is some action you want to take. Maybe an idea or a plan that has come that will help you address your needs.

You can write that out here:

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Next Steps

You might want to consider some free journaling now, or later on today or tomorrow, just to see what more comes.

You can make notes here, or use additional paper.

Work with me

Maybe you'd like some support to transform the effects of stress so you can feel better and cope well. Check out the [ways you can work with me here](#) or [schedule a free, 30-minute phone consultation here](#).

Thank you for your interest, and for working with this journal.

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About the author



I'm Shulamit Ber Levtov, the Entrepreneur's Therapist.

I work with women business owners to care for their mental and emotional wellbeing in an era of relentless stressors that can make you lose your shit on the daily, because mental and emotional well-being sets the foundation for sustainable success and enables you to show up fully as your CEO-self in your business.

I have been an entrepreneur for over 27 years and have more than 22 years of professional experience applying therapeutic, coaching and somatic tools to support women's mental health and personal growth. I also speak and teach about the intersection of mental health, trauma, financial psychology and entrepreneurship locally, nationally and internationally.

As an award-winning entrepreneur, masters-level, licensed trauma therapist and trauma survivor, with certifications in the Trauma of Money, Nonviolent Communication and Yoga, I bring a unique perspective and approach to supporting women in business.

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<p style="text-align: center;">Common sensations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tender • Sensitive • Bruised • Achy • Sore • Tense • Tight • Nauseous 	<p style="text-align: center;">Sensations that just won't stay still</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaky • Trembly • Throbbing • Pounding • Fluttery • Shivery • Queasy • Wobbly • Bubbly • Dizzy • Spacey • Breathless
<p style="text-align: center;">Sensations that have a nerve-quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prickly • Electric • Tingling • Nervy • Twitchy • Burning • Radiating • Referring • Buzzy • Itchy 	<p style="text-align: center;">The 'Feel Stabby Much?' List</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tense • Tight • Constricted • Clenched • Knotted • Hot • Full • Sweaty
<p style="text-align: center;">The Ugh and Blah Category</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooden • Congested • Dull • Dense • Frozen • Icy • Disconnected • Thick • Blocked • Contracted • Heavy • Suffocated • Cold • Numb • Closed • Dark • Hollow 	<p style="text-align: center;">Signals of wellbeing and vitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm • Energized • Smooth • Streaming • Warm • Cool • Relaxed • Open • Light • Spacious • Airy • Releasing • Expanded • Expansive • Flowing • Floating • Fluid

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<p>SAD</p> <p>anguished ashamed brokenhearted depressed disappointed / discouraged disheartened fragile helpless / despairing lonely miserable / numb troubled / hurt vulnerable</p>	<p>GLAD</p> <p>confident / thrilled delighted encouraged excited grateful happy / ecstatic hopeful / eager inspired / elated optimistic proud relieved / secure satisfied</p>	<p>MAD</p> <p>agitated angry annoyed / irritated impatient jealous pessimistic resentful restless / numb upset bitter / hostile disgusted furious / outraged / hatred</p>
<p>TIRED</p> <p>burned out distracted exhausted / frazzled fatigued / depleted fragile helpless indifferent lethargic overwhelmed restless off center weary</p>	<p>SCARED</p> <p>alarmed anxious / numb guarded horrified / terrified jealous lonely nervous / suspicious overwhelmed / guilty panicky shocked tense / wary worried / disturbed</p>	<p>CONFUSED</p> <p>bewildered doubtful frustrated / conflicted hesitant / cautious hurt puzzled / rattled reluctant / unclear sceptical torn / unsure troubled / unsettled uncomfortable uneasy / disturbed</p>

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PEACEFUL	LOVING	PLAYFUL
absorbed / alive	affectionate / warm	creative
amazed / dazzled	alive	curious / intrigued
blissful / awed	appreciative	eager / interested
calm / relaxed	aroused	energetic
comfortable	content	exhilarated / exuberant
confident	electrified	fascinated
content / satisfied	fulfilled	free / adventurous
fulfilled	moved	inspired
loving	nurtured / nurturing	invigorated / refreshed
relaxed	sensitive	passionate
secure	tender / enchanted	stimulated
serene / groovy	trusting	

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NEEDS

<p><u>PHYSICAL SURVIVAL</u></p> <p>air / food / water touch shelter health safety / security consistency sexual expression rest / relaxation</p>	<p><u>NURTURANCE</u></p> <p>touch physical affection warmth tenderness caring bonding comfort</p>	<p><u>MENTAL</u></p> <p>stimulation / challenge clarity / to understand comprehension information awareness reflection discrimination</p>
<p><u>AUTONOMY</u></p> <p>to choose one's goals, values, and ways to realize them</p> <p>independence (to chose plans for fulfilling one's dreams) choice individuality self-empowerment solitude freedom (emotional, spiritual, and physical)</p>	<p><u>INTEGRITY</u></p> <p>to live one's values</p> <p>self-worth authenticity (to be true to oneself) respect self-respect purpose / meaning vision / dreams honesty effectiveness</p>	<p><u>INTERDEPENDENCE</u></p> <p>to receive & to extend to others</p> <p>acceptance appreciation closeness community connection consideration cooperation emotional safety and freedom</p>

