



# The Emotional Availability Journal

A tool to help you connect deeply with people  
who nurture your wellbeing



THE WELLNESS  
SOCIETY

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## How to Use This Journal

This journal is not designed to be completed in a day – it's a tool for life.

Your journey to becoming emotionally unavailable was not a quick one. Similarly, becoming more emotionally available doesn't happen overnight.

Take your time to work through this and process the insights it provides you.

There's *a lot* to unpack here!

- Parts one and two will help you develop a deeper understanding of the concept of emotional availability and healthy relationships in general.
- Part three is about developing your self-awareness and exploring possible ways forward.
- Finally, you'll clarify your insights and create an action plan to increase your emotional availability.

If you run out of space anywhere, you can use the Additional Notes and Reflections pages (48-50).

Different sections of this journal will be more relevant to you depending on your life circumstances. Over time, feel free to dip in and out of the content as you see fit.

We hope this journal helps you learn a lot about yourself, your journey, and the person you aspire to be.

Take care,

Rebecca and the team  
**The Wellness Society**

*"I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become." – Carl Jung*



# PART ONE

## *Understanding Emotional Availability*

—

# How to Evaluate Emotional Availability

Have you noticed a pattern in your relationships in which your partner – or potential partner – seems unable to offer you the love and attention you desire?

You may have a habit of seeking out emotionally unavailable people. And you may be emotionally unavailable yourself.

Emotional unavailability refers to a pattern of behaviour in which a person struggles or is unable to engage in emotionally intimate and fulfilling relationships.

## 6 Key Signs of Emotional Unavailability

What are the signs that someone is emotionally unavailable?

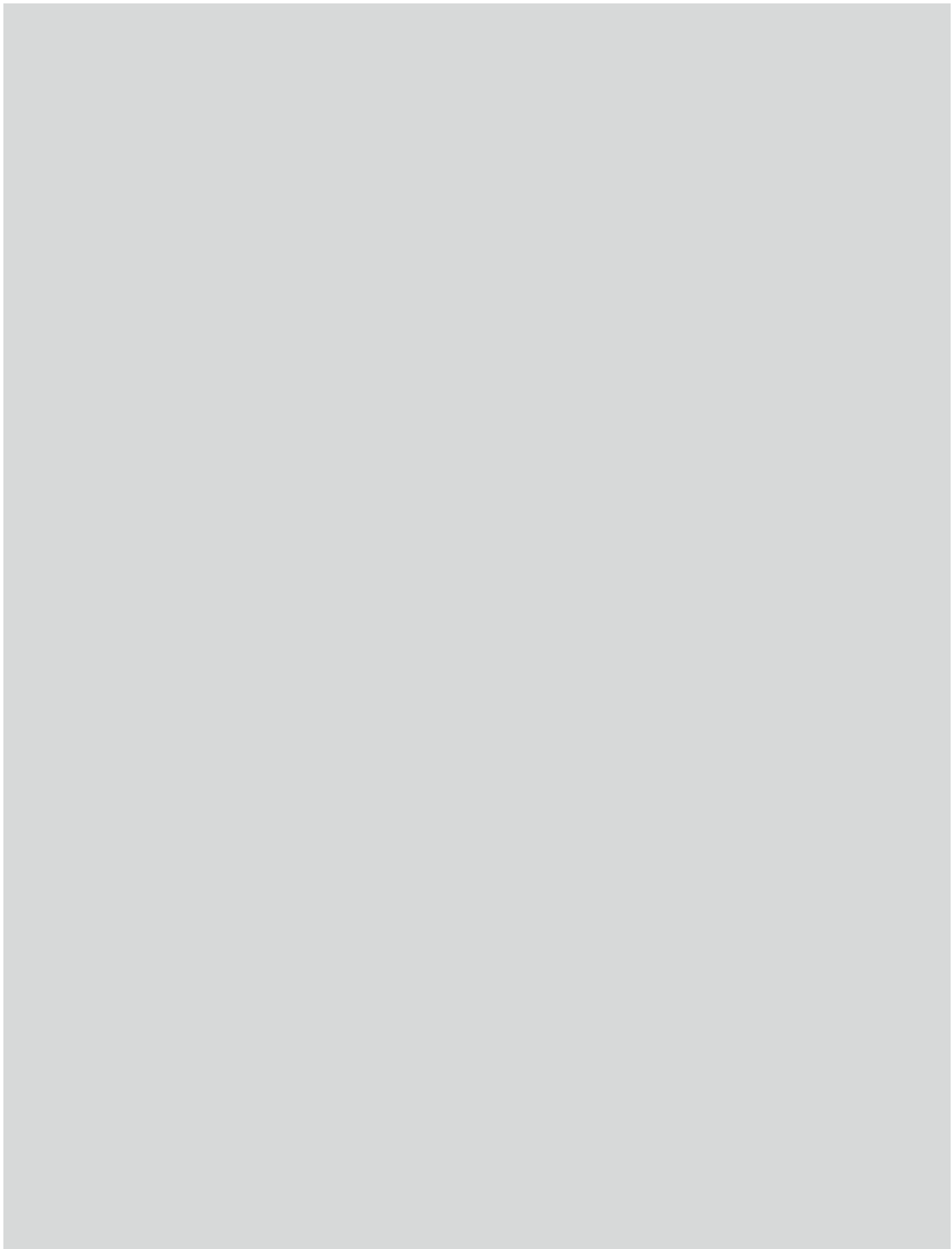
- 1. Poor Communication.** They show a lack of investment in maintaining regular contact or conversation. They might be slow to respond to messages or provide minimal information when communicating.
- 2. Avoidance of Emotional Intimacy.** Emotionally unavailable people often find it challenging to open up and share their deeper thoughts, fears, or insecurities. They may deflect or change the subject when discussions require an element of vulnerability.
- 3. Fear of Commitment.** Avoidance of long-term commitment are common among emotionally unavailable people. They may be hesitant to enter into or progress in a committed relationship, often maintaining emotional distance or creating barriers that prevent deeper connection.
- 4. Prioritizing Independence and Freedom.** Emotionally unavailable people tend to prioritize their independence and personal freedom over building and nurturing emotional connections. They may resist merging their lives, sharing responsibilities, or making compromises that come with a committed relationship.
- 5. Inconsistent or Unpredictable Behaviour.** They may display inconsistent patterns of behaviour, oscillating between moments of closeness and emotional withdrawal.
- 6. Trust Issues.** Building trust can be challenging for emotionally unavailable people. They may have trust issues stemming from past experiences or personal insecurities, which can make it difficult for them to fully trust and rely on their partners.

## Journal Prompts to Evaluate Emotional Availability

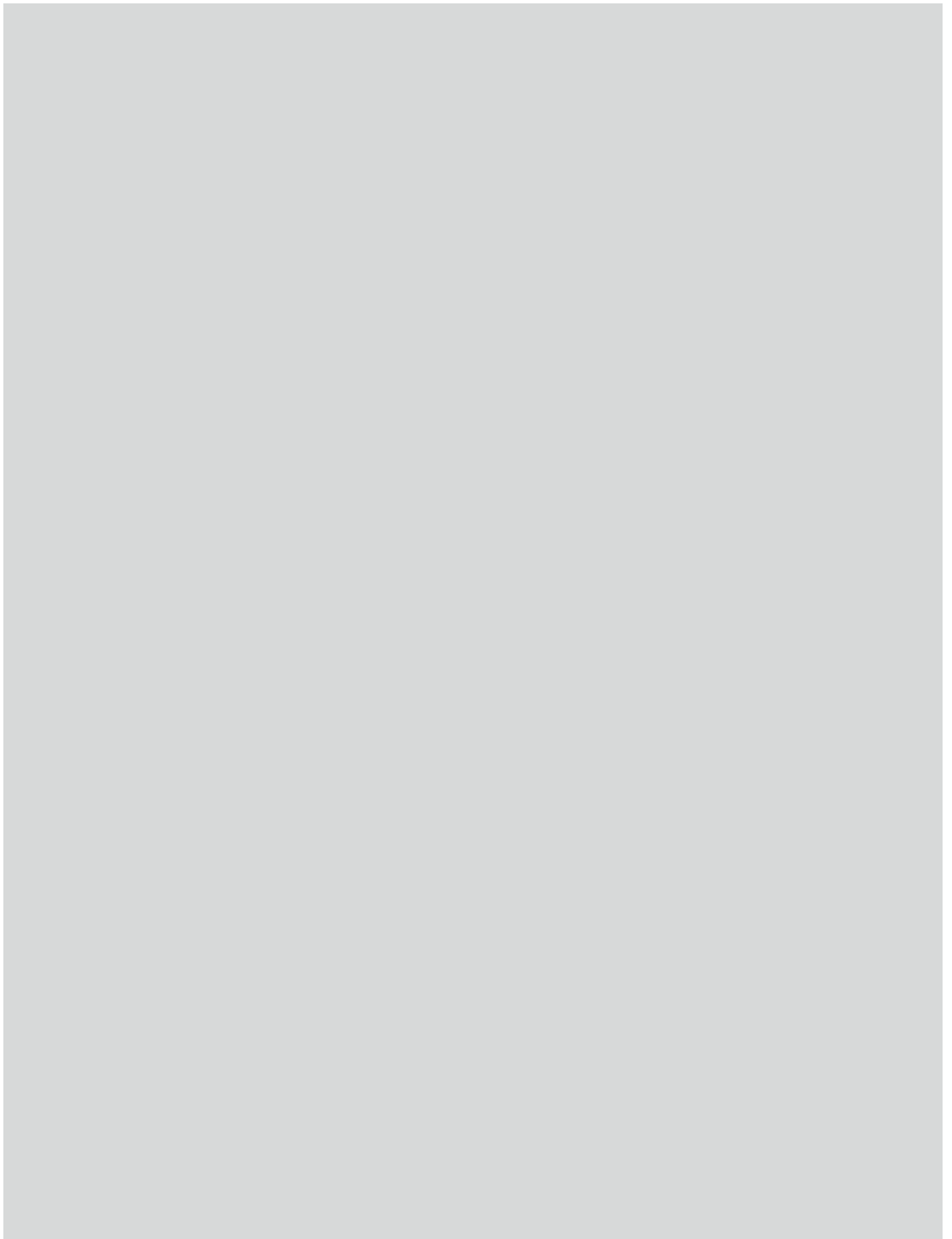
- Reflect on the frequency and quality of communication with this person. Do you feel that the communication is consistent and open, or otherwise?
- How comfortable does this person appear when discussing their deeper thoughts, fears, or insecurities? Do they engage in meaningful conversations about emotions, or do they seem avoidant or dismissive?
- How does this person typically respond when I express my emotions? Do they actively listen and offer support, or do they dismiss or minimize my feelings?
- How does this person talk about and approach commitment in general?
- How do they handle conflict or disagreements? Are they able to express their emotions in a constructive manner, or do they become defensive or shut down emotionally?
- What past experiences could be contributing to the person's trust issues? How might these factors be influencing their present behaviour?
- Reflect on your overall emotional experience in the relationship. Do you feel fulfilled and supported emotionally, or do you often find yourself longing for deeper emotional connection and intimacy?



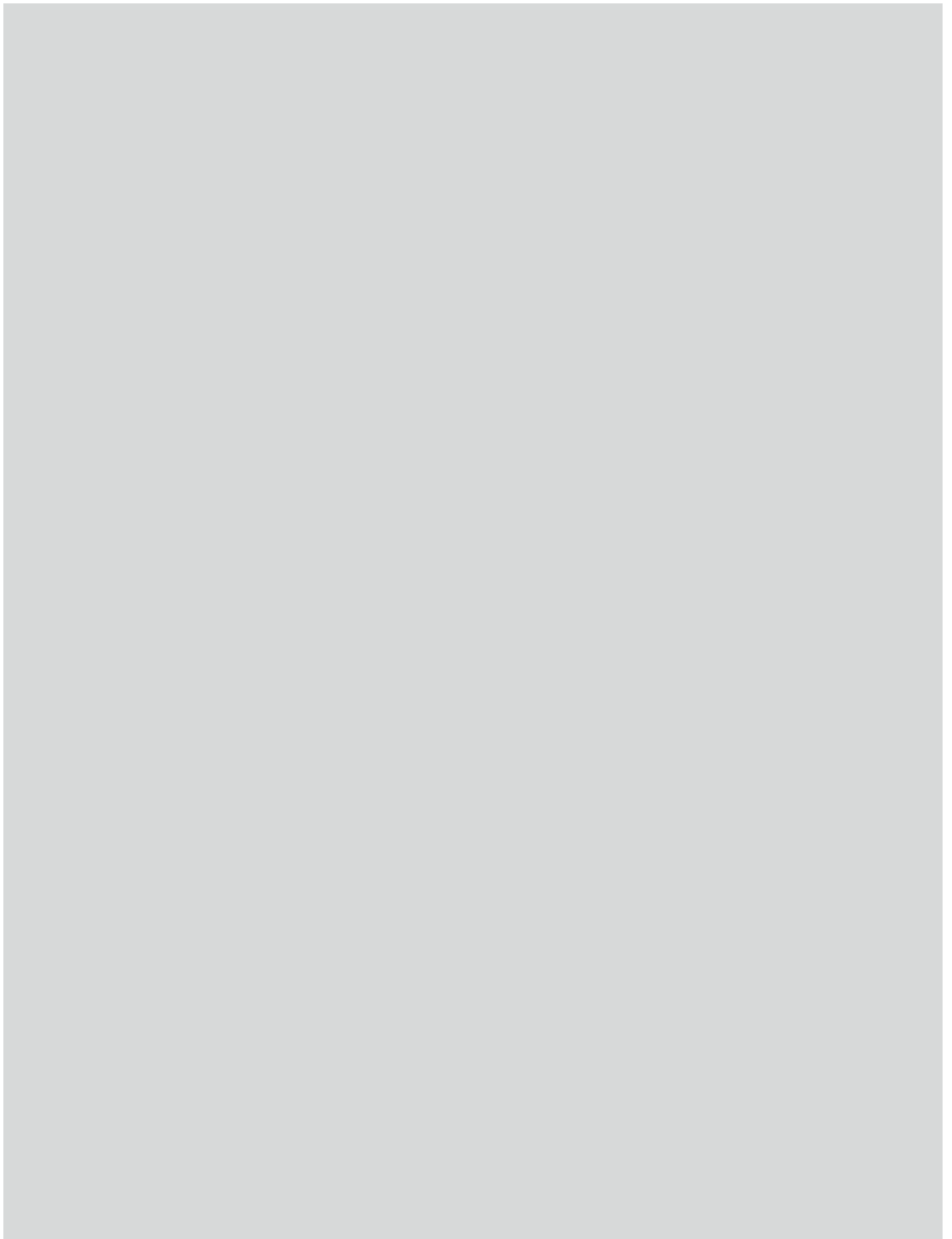
Journal Prompt:



## Journal Prompt:



## Journal Prompt:





# Causes of Emotional Unavailability

## 1. Past Trauma

One significant factor is [past trauma or abuse](#).

Individuals who've experienced traumatic events or abusive relationships may develop emotional unavailability as a type of defense mechanism. They may learn to disconnect from their emotions and avoid vulnerability in order to protect themselves from further emotional pain.

Fear of being hurt, rejected, or engulfed by the intensity of emotional connection can lead them to maintain emotional distance from others.

Past trauma can lead to the development of an insecure [attachment style](#). Attachment styles, which develop in early childhood through interactions with caregivers, shape how we relate to others emotionally. Those with an insecure attachment style may struggle with emotional intimacy and tend to keep others at a distance.

## 2. External Conditioning

Emotionally unavailable people may have had inadequate emotional role models during childhood. Growing up in an environment where emotional expression and connection were not modeled or valued can limit a person's ability to engage in emotionally intimate relationships.

Emotionally unavailable men may also live in a culture which doesn't favour masculine expression of emotion, perpetuating the notion that men should be stoic and avoid vulnerability. In such cultures, societal expectations might discourage them from openly expressing their feelings or seeking emotional support.

## 3. Lifestyle Factors

In addition, certain lifestyles or demanding careers may make it challenging for people to invest emotionally in a relationship. They may have limited time and energy available due to work commitments, travel, or other obligations, making it difficult to sustain a deep emotional connection.

Also, some people might be emotionally unavailable due to their focus on self-discovery and personal growth. They may want to explore different connections and develop a deeper understanding of their own needs and desires before committing to a serious relationship.

# Why We're Attracted to Emotional Unavailability

While there's no definitive answer, several theories attempt to explain why this attraction occurs.

## 1. Low Self-Esteem

People with low self-esteem may unconsciously seek out emotionally unavailable partners because they believe they don't deserve someone who is emotionally available.

They might feel more comfortable in relationships where their own emotional needs take a backseat to their partner's unavailability.



They may also unconsciously believe that if they can win over an emotionally unavailable person, it will prove their worthiness or competence.

## 2. Romanticizing the Challenge

Similarly, some people find the idea of “winning over” or changing an emotionally unavailable person appealing. They may perceive this challenge as an opportunity to prove their worth or demonstrate their love and dedication.

The belief that they can be the one to unlock the emotional barriers can be enticing, despite the potential difficulties involved.

## 3. Stimulation Seeking

Another theory is that pursuing emotionally unavailable people produces stress hormones, and these are in some ways addictive.

You may get used to the stimulation of cortisol and seek situations that maintain your emotional arousal. If you’re used to cortisol-fuelled relationships, healthy relationships may have a “boring” feel to them in comparison, like something is missing.

While the stimulation of cortisol might initially create a sense of excitement or intensity, long-term engagement with emotionally unavailable people can lead to distress, dissatisfaction, and a perpetuation of unhealthy relationship patterns.

## 4. You’re Emotionally Unavailable

Emotionally unavailable people may be attracted to other emotionally unavailable people due to:

- Avoidance of emotional intimacy
- Familiarity
- Repetition compulsion
- Cravings/limerence

Let’s explore each of these in more detail.

### *Avoidance of Emotional Intimacy*

Emotionally unavailable individuals often have difficulties with emotional intimacy and vulnerability. Being with another emotionally unavailable person allows them to avoid the discomfort and potential risks associated with opening up emotionally. They may feel less pressure to address their own emotional challenges or confront their fear of intimacy when their partner shows similar behaviours.

Emotional unavailability can also provide a clear boundary between emotionally unavailable people and their partner, creating a sense of psychological safety. The lack of emotional intimacy can be appealing for [individuals with C-PTSD](#) who struggle with boundary-related difficulties.

### *Familiarity*

Emotional unavailability can feel familiar and comfortable to individuals who’ve grown accustomed to this dynamic. They might find it easier to relate to someone who shares similar



emotional patterns. Plus, the feeling of sharing your struggles with another person can be very comforting.

The familiarity of emotional unavailability can create a sense of safety and a perception of control over the known dynamics, even if it is ultimately unhealthy. As humans, we have an inherent [aversion to uncertainty](#). The unknown can trigger feelings of fear, doubt, and vulnerability, which we want to avoid.

### *Repetition Compulsion*

Individuals may unconsciously seek out relationships that mirror their past experiences. If they grew up in an environment with emotionally unavailable caregivers, they may unintentionally be drawn to emotionally unavailable partners as a way to repeat or recreate familiar patterns.

Some psychologists believe that repetition compulsion stems from a subconscious desire to resolve past unresolved issues or gain a sense of control over the situation.

### *Cravings/Limerence*

If you had an emotionally unavailable or [emotionally immature](#) caregiver, it's likely that as a child, you were craving their love and attention.

Now, as an adult pursuing a similarly emotionally distant person, the same brain circuits involving cravings may be triggered.

It's interesting to note that craving is distinct from liking. Much research has been done into this in the field of drugs and addiction. In the context of drugs, liking refers to the hedonic experience or pleasure derived from taking a drug, while wanting refers to the motivational aspect or the craving for the drug.

Drugs can induce intense wanting, even in the absence of liking.

Both love and drugs can produce dopamine in the brain, and there are similarities in how they affect the brain's reward system.

It's worth considering: How much do you *want/crave* vs *like* the emotionally unavailable person? How much are you craving their love and attention as opposed to actually liking them? How well do you *really* know them?

## What Is Limerence?

Limerence, a term coined by psychologist Dorothy Tennov in her book *Love and Limerance: The Experience of Being in Love*, is a related concept here. This involves experiencing thoughts and yearnings about your love interest that are uncontrollable and all-consuming.

It's different from genuine love because it's not necessarily based on a deep emotional connection or mutual understanding, and it may involve idealization of the other person. Just like a perceived threat can trigger the stress response, an emotionally distant person may trigger a limerence response in us.

It's a form of conditioning – like Pavlov's dogs drooling with saliva at the ring of a bell, we're craving for attention at the hands of emotionally unavailable people.



*“What we learned about love and relationships from our childhood feels normal. But just because something feels familiar doesn’t mean it’s healthy. Spend five minutes today quietly reflecting on one of your relationships. Does it enrich your life? If you find that it doesn’t, consider what changes you need to make so the relationship feeds you.”*

*- Judith Hanson Lasater*

## 10 Signs of Limerence

1. Persistent and intrusive thoughts about the person.
2. Idealizing and romanticizing them, overlooking their flaws and potential red flags.
3. Intense emotional highs when the person reciprocates your feelings or shows interest in you.
4. Extreme lows and despair when the person's affection isn't returned or there are obstacles to the relationship.
5. Heightened sensitivity to the other person's words, actions, and perceived signals.
6. Strong desire for reciprocation and constantly seeking validation from the other person.
7. Preoccupation with the person's wellbeing and constantly thinking about their actions or whereabouts.
8. Difficulty focusing on other aspects of life and reduced interest in activities unrelated to them.
9. Daydreaming about a future with the person and imagining idealized scenarios together.
10. Feelings of obsession and an inability to control or stop thinking about the person.

### Journal Prompt

Which theories resonate the most with me? Why might I be attracted to emotional unavailability?



## What Causes Limerence?

If a person didn't receive emotional nurturance during their childhood, they may develop a tendency to fantasize about intense emotional connections throughout adolescence and in adulthood. Limerence can serve as an escape from the emotional void they experienced, as they project their unmet emotional needs onto a specific person.

Media also has a part to play. Movies, TV shows, and books, frequently present romantic fantasies that captivate and engage audiences. These fantasies can fuel our desire for intense and all-consuming emotional connections, mirroring limerence. Repeated exposure to such fantasies through media can reinforce the idea that limerence is a desirable and normal part of romantic love.

The media also tends to focus on the early stages of relationships, where intense infatuation and passion are prevalent. This selective portrayal can give us a skewed perception that love is primarily characterized by the euphoria and obsession associated with limerence. As a result, we may mistakenly believe that limerence is a key aspect of love and overlook the importance of other vital elements, such as compatibility, mutual respect, and long-term commitment.

### Journal Prompts to Evaluate Limerence

- Consider your interactions with your person of interest. Do you feel as though you're constantly seeking their attention and validation? How does their response or lack thereof affect your mood?
- To what extent could you be idealizing this person? Are you attributing exaggerated positive qualities to them? Are you ignoring or downplaying any flaws or red flags that may exist?
- Reflect on the amount of time and energy you invest in thinking about the person. How much of your day is consumed by thoughts or daydreams about them? Do these thoughts distract you from other aspects of your life?



*“The unexamined  
life is not worth  
living.”*

*- Socrates*

# Love vs Limerence

## Emotional Experience

Love	Limerence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emotional stability and balance</li><li>• Calm and contentment</li><li>• Genuine affection and care</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rollercoaster of emotions</li><li>• Fear and anxiety</li><li>• Obsessive thoughts and infatuation</li></ul>

## Relationship Dynamics

Love	Limerence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mutual respect and equality</li><li>• Open and honest communication</li><li>• Mutual emotional support and empathy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Idealization; putting the other on a pedestal</li><li>• Imbalanced power dynamics</li><li>• All-consuming focus on the other</li></ul>

## Autonomy and Independence

Love	Limerence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Healthy boundaries and space</li><li>• Mutual trust and security</li><li>• Support and encouragement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vague boundaries</li><li>• Insecurity and fear of rejection</li><li>• Gaining validation and attention</li></ul>

Love is characterized by a deep emotional connection and bond with another person. It's a gradual and often long-term experience that focuses on building a lasting relationship.

You have an understanding of who they are based on sharing life together.

Love values mutual care, support, and understanding between partners. It promotes individual autonomy and personal growth, encouraging each partner to pursue their passions and interests.

Love thrives on healthy boundaries, respect for personal space, and a sense of trust and security.

Limerence, on the other hand, is an intense infatuation or obsession with someone that's often quickly developed. It's characterized by an overwhelming desire for attention and validation from the other person.

You may have a distorted perception of who they are based on idealization and projection.

It involves extreme highs and lows, accompanied by obsessive thoughts and fantasies. You may sacrifice your personal interests and boundaries for the other.

While love is based on mutual connection, care, and support, limerence tends to be characterised by infatuation, obsession, and an unbalanced emotional state.





# Common Relationship Patterns of Emotionally Unavailable People

There are multiple relationship dynamics that reinforce or perpetuate a pattern of unhealthy or unfulfilling relationships, for example:

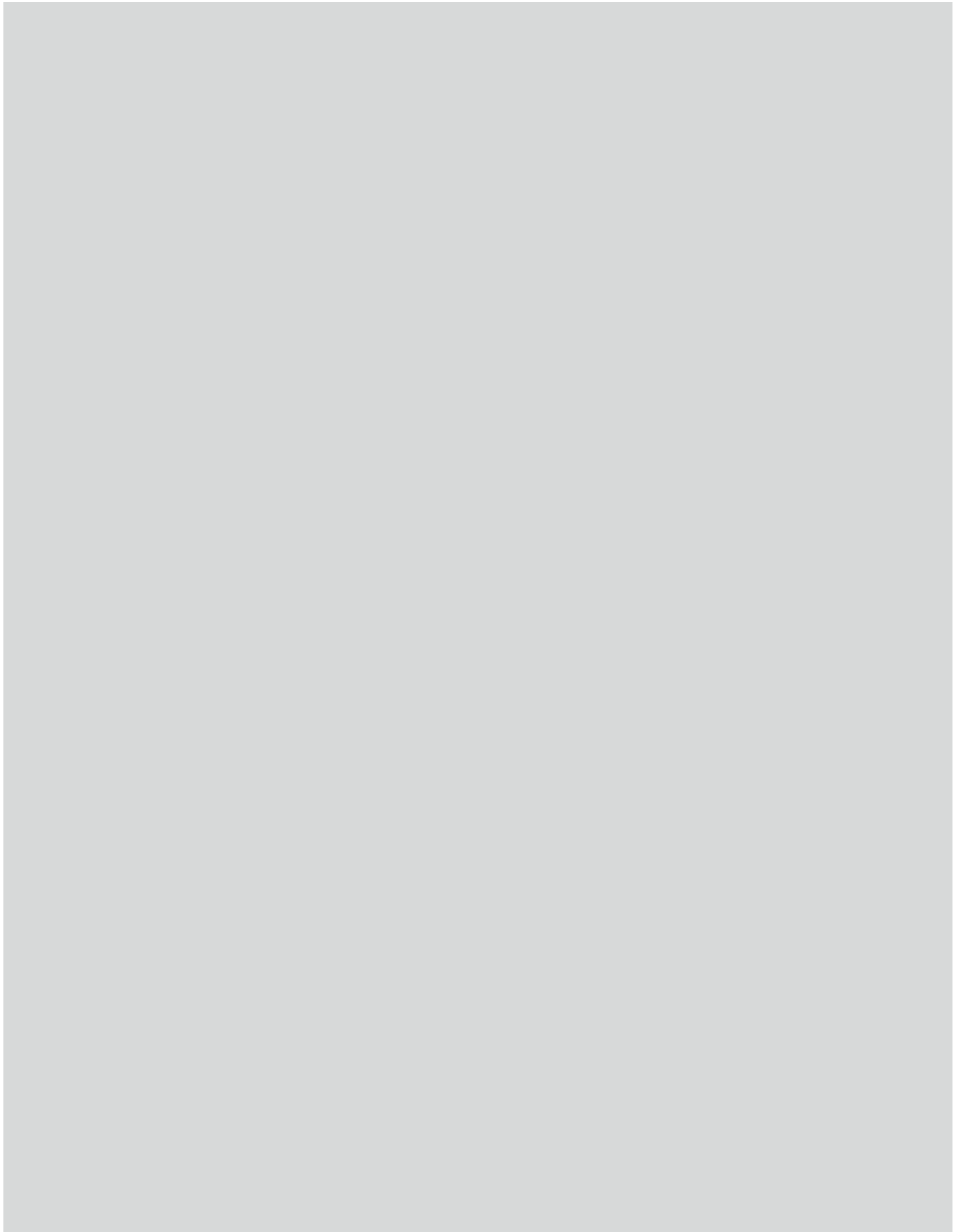
- **Selecting Incompatible Partners.** Some people may find themselves attracted to partners with whom they're fundamentally incompatible. This could be due to differences in values, life goals, interests, or personalities. Pursuing an incompatible partner can serve as a subconscious way for emotionally unavailable people to create barriers to emotional intimacy. By being with someone who they know deep down is not a good long-term match, they can avoid getting too close or facing the potential vulnerability and commitment required in a truly compatible relationship.
- **Engaging in Casual or Non-Committed Relationships.** Casual relationships, such as friends with benefits or flings, often lack emotional depth or long-term commitment. This allows emotionally unavailable people to avoid vulnerability and maintain a sense of independence.
- **Being in Long-Distance Relationships.** Being in a long-distance relationship creates physical and emotional distance between partners, which can be appealing to someone who's emotionally unavailable. This distance provides a sense of safety and prevents them from fully engaging emotionally in the relationship.
- **Finding Themselves in On-and-Off Relationships.** Emotionally unavailable people may find themselves in relationships that have a pattern of breaking up and getting back together. This pattern allows them to maintain a certain level of emotional distance and control, as they can retreat whenever the relationship becomes too close or intimate.
- **Pursuing Taken Partners.** Pursuing someone who's already taken provides a certain level of emotional unavailability because the person is not fully available for a new relationship. This situation allows the emotionally unavailable person to avoid the pressures and responsibilities of a committed partnership while still engaging in a connection that feels safe due to its limited potential for emotional intimacy.
- **Choosing Recently Single People.** Emotionally unavailable people can avoid forming a deep emotional connection by getting involved with someone who's still healing from a past relationship and thus is not yet fully emotionally available.
- **Self-Sabotaging or Unhealthy Stimulation Seeking.** These behaviors may be a defense mechanism, protecting emotionally unavailable people from getting too close to someone emotionally. They may push a partner away or create conflicts due to their fear of intimacy or vulnerability. By sabotaging the relationship, they maintain a sense of control and avoid the potential pain or disappointment that can come with a deeper connection. Unhealthy stimulation seeking can also be driven by a heightened need for excitement, novelty, or intensity. If someone constantly seeks out intense experiences, they may struggle to find satisfaction in stable, long-term relationships. This can lead to a pattern of leaving partners after the honeymoon phase, preventing them from developing long-term, more fulfilling relationships.

Be gentle with yourself while completing the next page. [Self-compassion](#) is key. Notice your inner critic and be mindful with how you respond to them. Focus your mind on the learning experiences you've had – what are the lessons from your past?



## Journal Prompt

How have your past relationship patterns reinforced your emotional unavailability? How would you like to act differently in future?



*“Life is a succession  
of lessons that  
must be lived to  
be understood.”*

*- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

# PART TWO

## *Developing Discernment*

—

# Green and Red Flags

Do you feel as though your red flag detector is broken?

Do you have a tendency to “fall into” relationships?

Perhaps you develop feelings quickly, only to feel disappointed when you soon realise that the person isn't who you thought they were?

This section is all about helping you develop discernment – the ability to choose and invest in a partner who nurtures your wellbeing.

In addition, you'll consider your own green and red flags, helping you develop a deeper understanding of your personal growth journey.

If you still feel unsure about whether or not someone's behaviour is unacceptable, we urge you to [seek professional support](#). Sometimes, when you're caught up in a relationship, it can be challenging to objectively assess red flags. You might also find it difficult to trust your own judgment, and want someone to help validate your concerns.

Therapy provides a safe and non-judgmental space where you can express your thoughts and feelings. A therapist can offer you an outside perspective that's unbiased and objective, as well as helping you see patterns and behaviours that you might have difficulty recognizing on your own.

## Green Flags

- **Good Communication Skills.** They actively listen, express themselves clearly, and communicate openly and honestly. You feel heard, understood, and respected when you express your thoughts and feelings. A disagreement doesn't threaten the entire relationship.
- **Respectful and Supportive.** They show respect for your boundaries, opinions, and personal goals. They're supportive of your aspirations and encourage your personal growth. You lift each other up in front of others.
- **Trustworthy.** They're reliable and follow through on their commitments. They're honest and maintain transparency in their actions and words. Building trust takes time, but it's crucial for a healthy and fulfilling partnership.
- **Shared Values and Goals.** You have similar values, beliefs, and long-term goals. There's alignment in your vision for the future.
- **Healthy Independence.** They nurture their own interests, friendships, and personal space. They understand the importance of maintaining a balanced sense of independence within a relationship.
- **Kindness and Empathy.** They demonstrate compassion and consideration for others. They show kindness not only towards you but also towards others, which reflects their ability to care and prioritize the wellbeing of those around them.
- **Healthy Conflict Resolution.** They approach conflicts constructively, seeking resolution through calm and respectful communication. They're willing to address and work through issues.



- **Mutual Growth.** They support and encourage your personal growth, and you do the same for them. You inspire each other to become better people. At the same time, you both have a life outside of the relationship.
- **Shared Decision-Making.** They value your opinions and involve you in decision-making processes. They consider your thoughts and feelings when making important decisions that affect both of you.
- **They Prioritize Emotional Regulation.** They strive to manage their emotions in a healthy and balanced way. Their focus on emotional regulation contributes to a more secure and harmonious relationship where people feel safe to express themselves.
- **Intuitive Positive Feeling.** You feel a sense that things are “just right” with this person, and you think positively of them in their absence.
- **Physical and Sexual Compatibility.** You feel physically attracted to this person and have compatible desires, expectations, and boundaries in the realm of physical intimacy. It's important to note that while initial physical attraction often plays a role in sparking romantic interest, it's not the sole determinant of long-term compatibility or relationship satisfaction. Physical attraction can develop and evolve as you get to know someone on a deeper level.

## Red Flags

- **Speaking Badly of Exes.** While it's normal to acknowledge past relationship challenges, excessive negativity can suggest poor conflict resolution skills or an inability to take responsibility for their own role in relationship difficulties.
- **Lack of Communication.** They avoid or dismiss important conversations. They're frequently unresponsive or fail to communicate their thoughts and feelings.
- **Misalignment of Values.** There are significant differences in core values, beliefs, or life goals that create ongoing conflict or incompatible visions for the future.
- **Disrespectful Behaviour.** They disregard your boundaries, ignoring you when you say no. They engage in demeaning language, or belittle your opinions or aspirations. They flirt with other people in front of you, make sexual comments about others, or make hurtful comments about your appearance.
- **Dishonesty.** They engage in dishonest or deceitful behaviour, such as lying, hiding information, or breaking trust.
- **Jealousy.** While a small amount of jealousy is normal, constant jealousy can indicate insecurity, possessiveness, or a lack of trust. It can manifest as unwarranted accusations or attempts to control your interactions with others.
- **Invasion of Privacy.** If your partner invades your privacy by reading your messages or emails, it's a red flag. This behaviour reflects a lack of trust, boundaries, and respect for your autonomy.
- **Anger Issues.** They display frequent anger, aggression, or a tendency to be physically or verbally abusive towards strangers, service staff, or while driving. You may feel as though you're walking on eggshells. You don't feel safe expressing yourself because you're unsure of how they'll react.



- **Lack of Positive Feelings.** If you consistently find yourself feeling unhappy, disconnected, or emotionally drained, it indicates that the relationship does not meet your emotional needs.
- **Lack of Desire for Physical Intimacy.** This may be due to factors such as emotional disconnection, unresolved conflicts, or changes in individual needs or desires.
- **Self-Abandonment.** They deny themselves the care, attention, and nurturing that's necessary for personal growth and fulfillment.
- **Codependency.** They exhibit clingy or controlling behaviour, constantly seeking validation and becoming overly dependent on the relationship.

## Deeper Dive: What Is Codependency?

Codependency is a relational pattern characterized by an excessive reliance on others for one's self-worth, identity, and emotional wellbeing.

Codependent individuals may feel lost or incomplete without a romantic partner. They often have difficulty setting healthy boundaries, prioritizing their own needs, and making independent decisions. They may feel a strong need to please others, neglecting their own wellbeing in the process.

They might experience an intense fear of being abandoned or rejected, which drives them to cling to relationships even when many red flags are present.

Growing up in a dysfunctional family environment, such as one with addiction, abuse, or neglect, can increase the likelihood of developing codependent patterns. In these situations, individuals learn to prioritize the needs of others and neglect their own in order to maintain stability or cope with difficult circumstances.

Codependent people may be particularly susceptible to developing limerence – their emotional dependency needs can make them more prone to becoming intensely infatuated with others and seeking validation and fulfillment through these relationships.

However, it's important to note that not all codependent relationships involve limerence, and not all cases of limerence are rooted in codependency. Instead, codependency and limerence are distinct experiences that can influence and reinforce each other.

Codependency	Interdependency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blurry or non-existent boundaries</li> <li>• Self-abandonment</li> <li>• Fear of abandonment</li> <li>• Poor self-esteem</li> <li>• Unconscious manipulation; desire to fix</li> <li>• Blame and resentment</li> <li>• Unbalanced power dynamics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy boundaries</li> <li>• Mutual support and respect for individuality</li> <li>• Embracing and respecting personal freedom</li> <li>• Healthy self-esteem</li> <li>• No hidden agendas; acceptance of other</li> <li>• Personal responsibility</li> <li>• Equal power and shared decision-making</li> </ul>

**Video Break:** [Rushing Into Relationships](#) and [Codependency Traits](#) by Crappy Childhood Fairy



# DAILY REMINDER

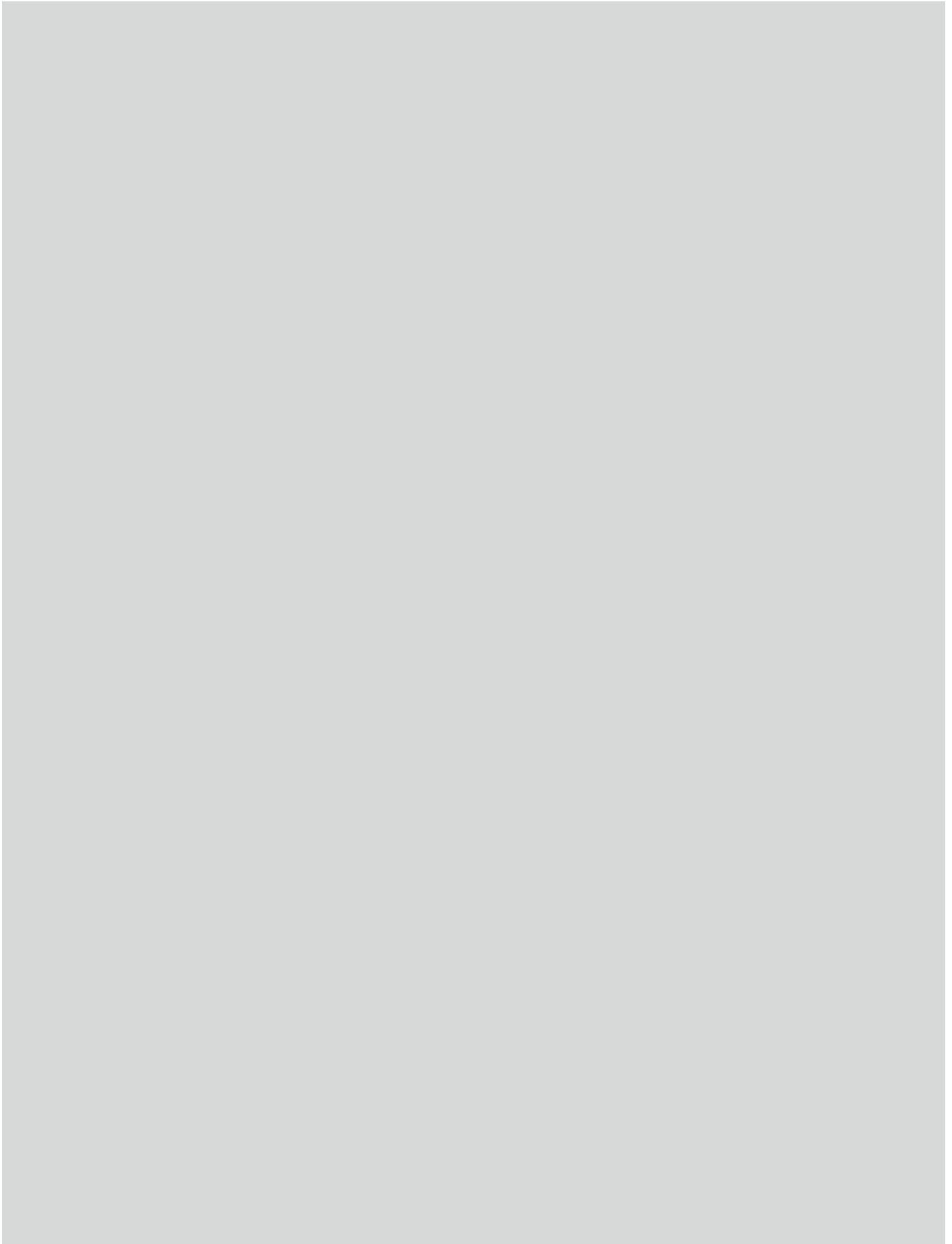
*Your feelings  
and needs  
matter*

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## Evaluating Green and Red Flags

Which green flags are present in this person or relationship?

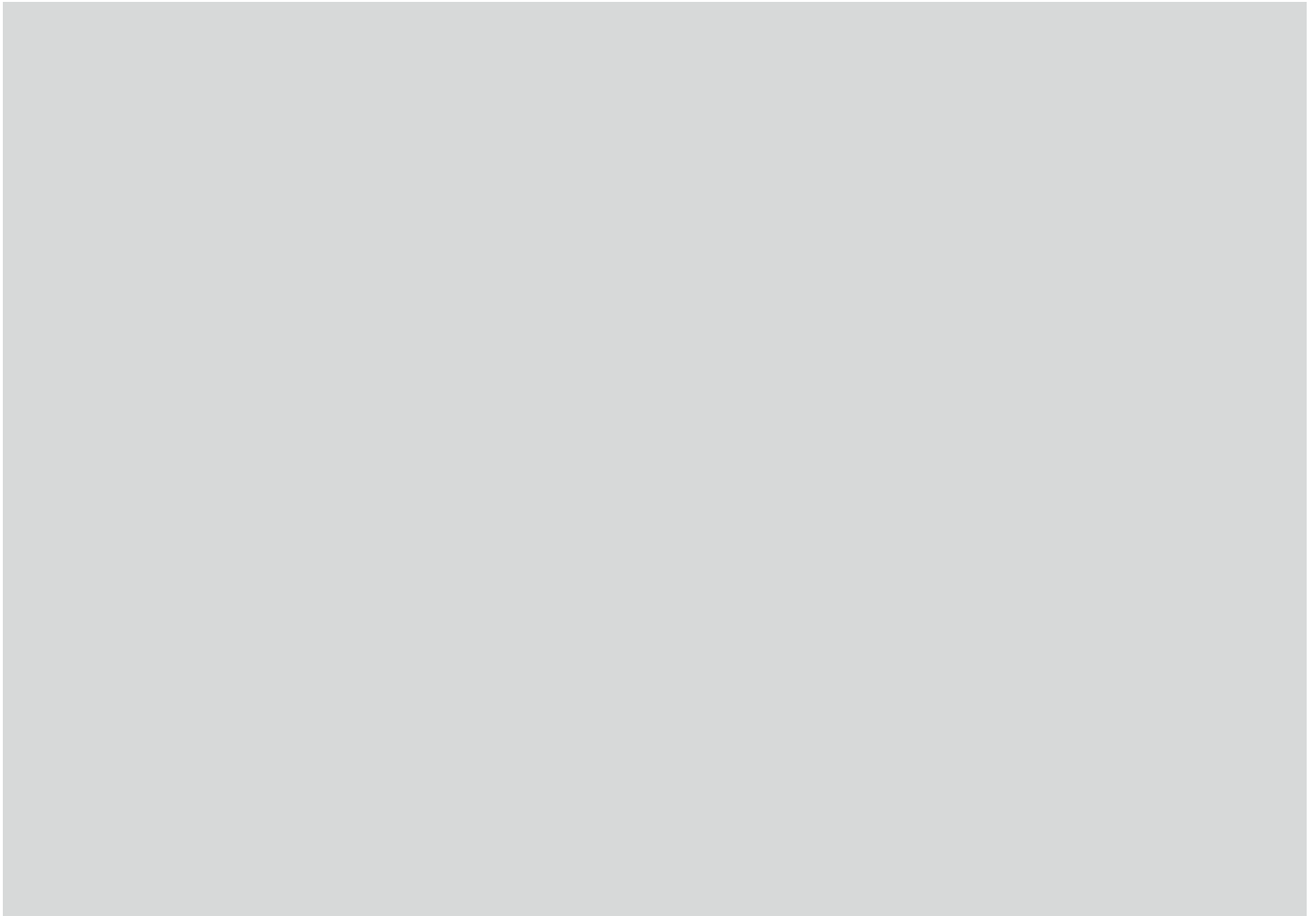


Which red flags are present in this person or relationship?

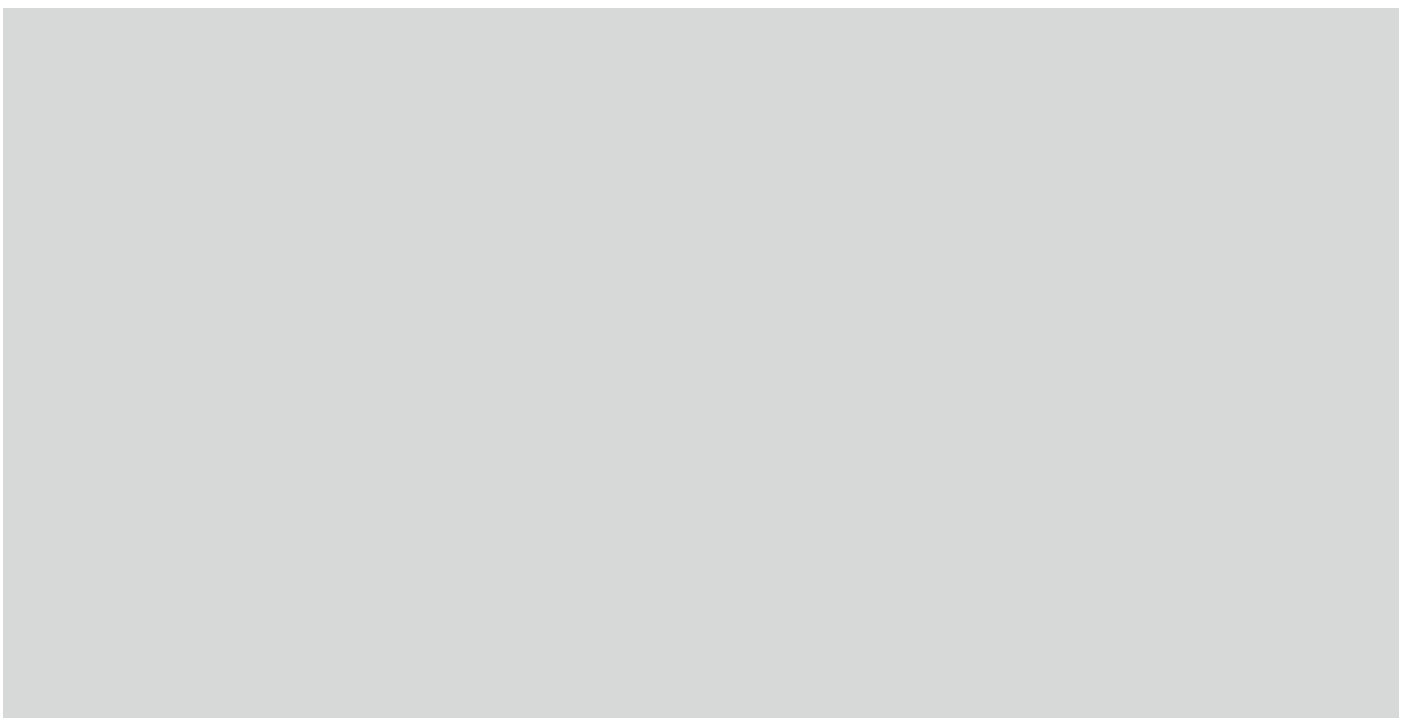


# Self-Assessment

Which green flags are present in me?

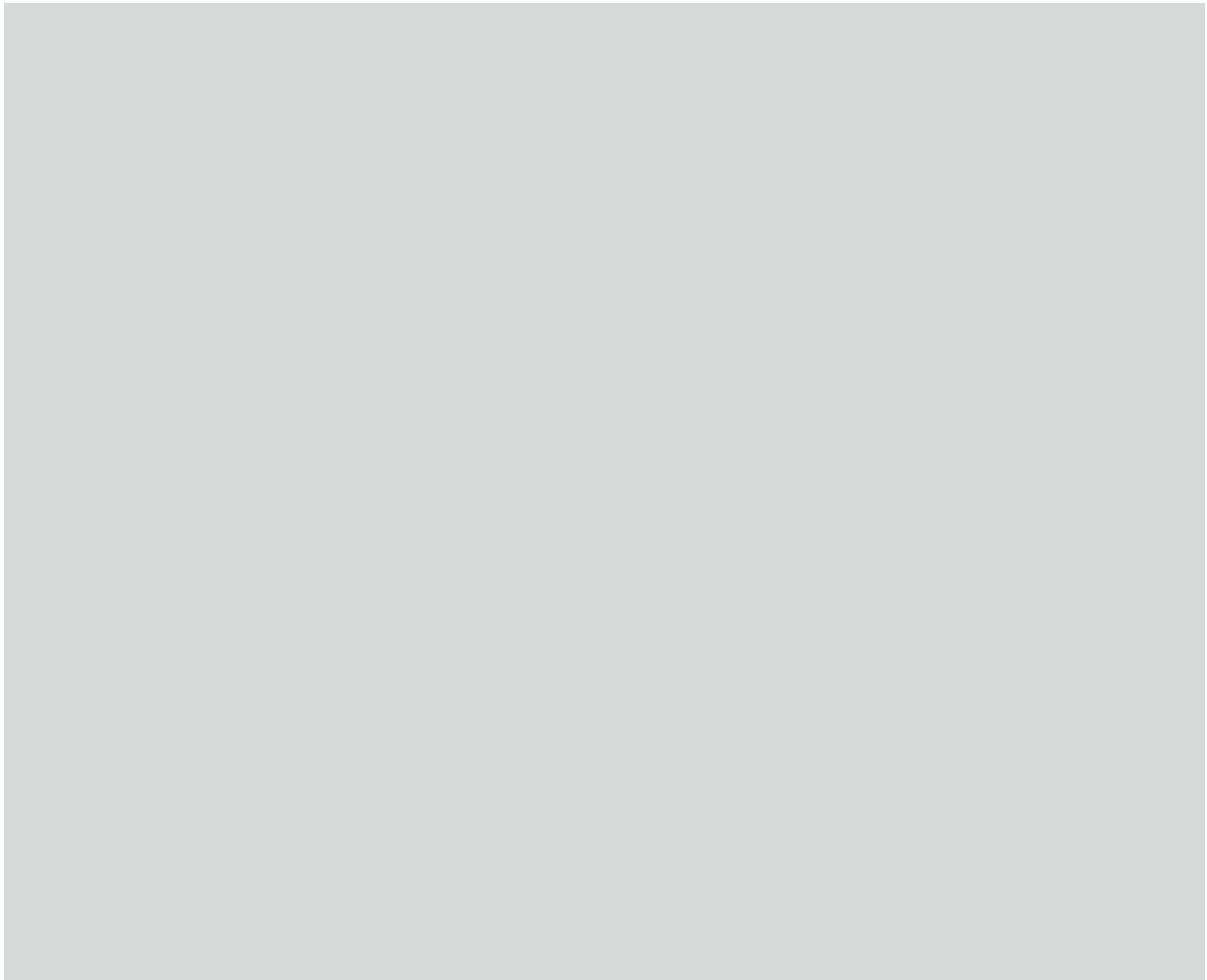


Which red flags are present in me? In general, how do I want to show up in future?





What could I do to address my red flags? Explore possible ways forward.



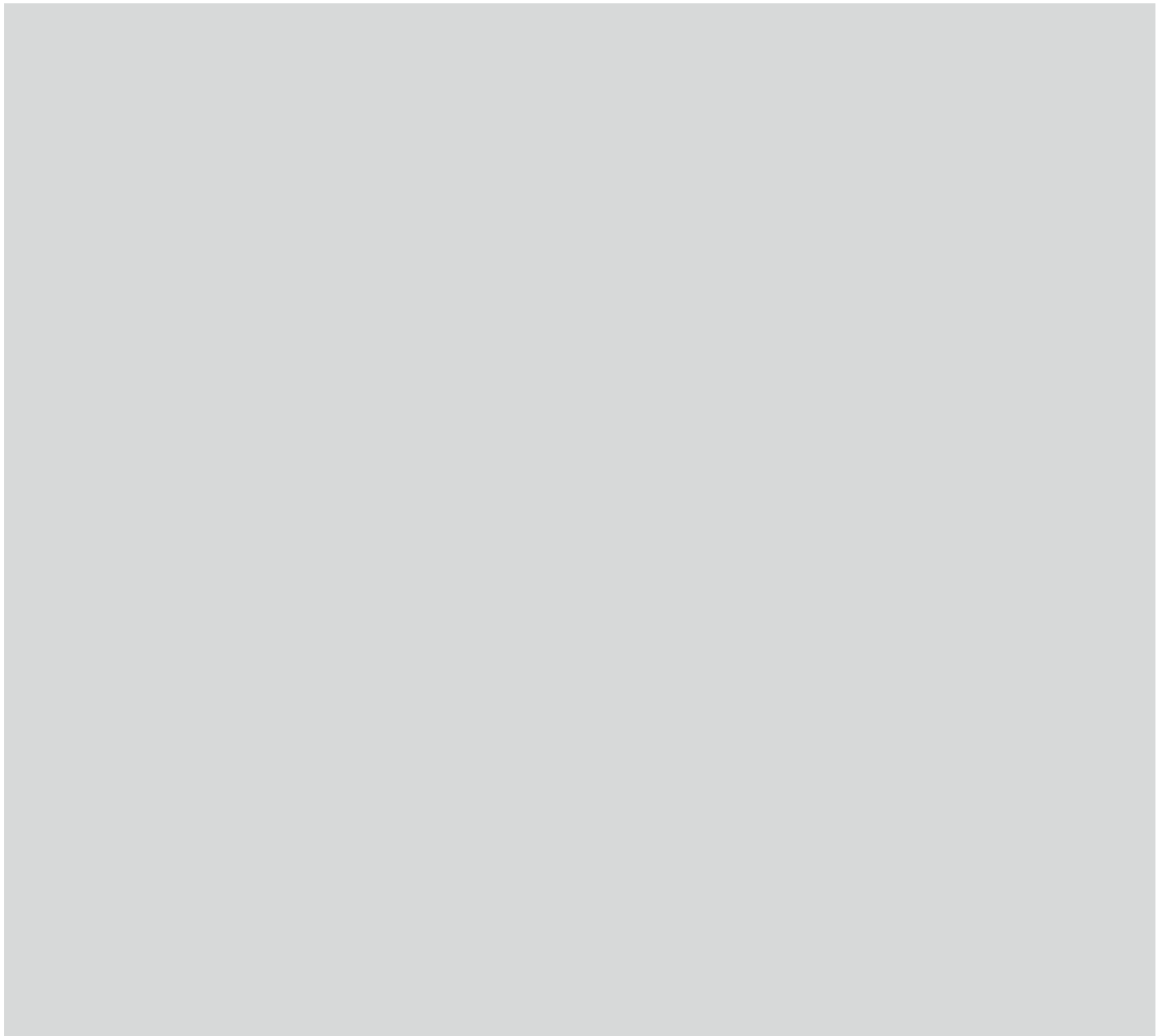
## My Ideal Partner

This exercise aims to help you clarify what you truly want in a relationship. Consider which values, qualities and characteristics are most important to you and create a vision of your ideal partner.

Having this written description can serve as a reference point during your dating or relationship journey. Comparing potential partners against this helps you make more informed decisions about who to invest your time and energy in. Consequently, it helps you avoid getting involved in relationships that don't align with your needs and preferences.

Remember that while having an ideal partner's description can be helpful, it's important to remain open-minded and flexible. People are complex, and relationships often involve compromise and growth. Use your description as a guide, but also be willing to embrace unexpected connections and allow room for the organic development of a relationship.

It's also important to remember that the perfect person does not exist. When you choose a person, you choose a set of problems. Healthy relationships involve an ongoing [conflict repair cycle](#). Problems are an integral part of all relationships.



# PART THREE

## *Increasing Emotional Availability*

—

# Increasing Self-Awareness Through Journaling

This section aims to help you explore your emotional patterns, beliefs, and barriers to emotional availability through journaling.

You'll be encouraged to reflect on past experiences or traumas that might have contributed to your emotional unavailability, increasing your self-awareness and helping you identify areas for growth and change.

**Note:** *This process may be emotionally challenging. Take baby steps and keep sessions brief if necessary, focusing on one prompt at a time. If you feel too overwhelmed, [consider seeking additional support](#). You can also try shifting to what feels like a more manageable section of this journal.*

Give yourself permission to write without judgment or censorship here. Let your thoughts and emotions flow, and don't worry about grammar or spelling.

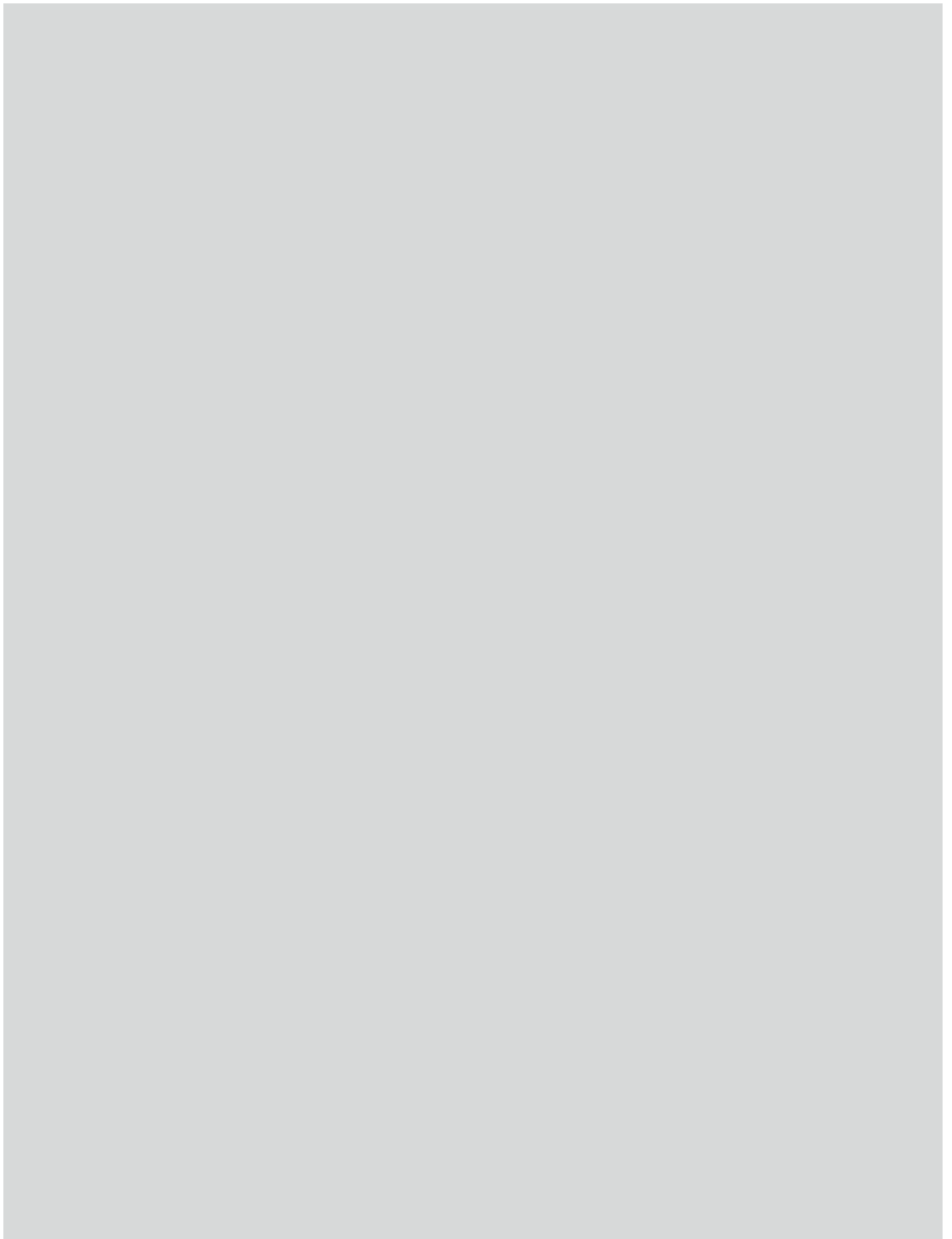
Below are seven prompts. Why not set yourself a *7 Days of Journaling Challenge* and try to complete one per day?

## Journal Prompts to Increase Self-Awareness

- What kind of environment did I experience growing up in relation to emotional expression and connection? How might this have shaped my current emotional availability?
- What are my beliefs around commitment and relationships in general? Where might they stem from?
- Reflect on the role of vulnerability in fostering deep connections. What does vulnerability mean to me, and how comfortable am I with expressing it? Which of my past relationship behaviours could be associated with the fear of vulnerability?
- What significant emotional risks have I taken in the past? How did they impact me? What have I learned from these experiences?
- Why did the people who hurt me in the past behave the way they did? Explore possible reasons. Is there any space in my heart for more understanding and forgiveness?
- Do my emotional availability issues show up in my friendships? If so, how?
- Write a letter to your younger self, offering compassion and guidance regarding emotional availability. What advice would you give? What reassurance or insights can you provide to your younger self as they navigate relationships and emotions?



## Journal Prompt:

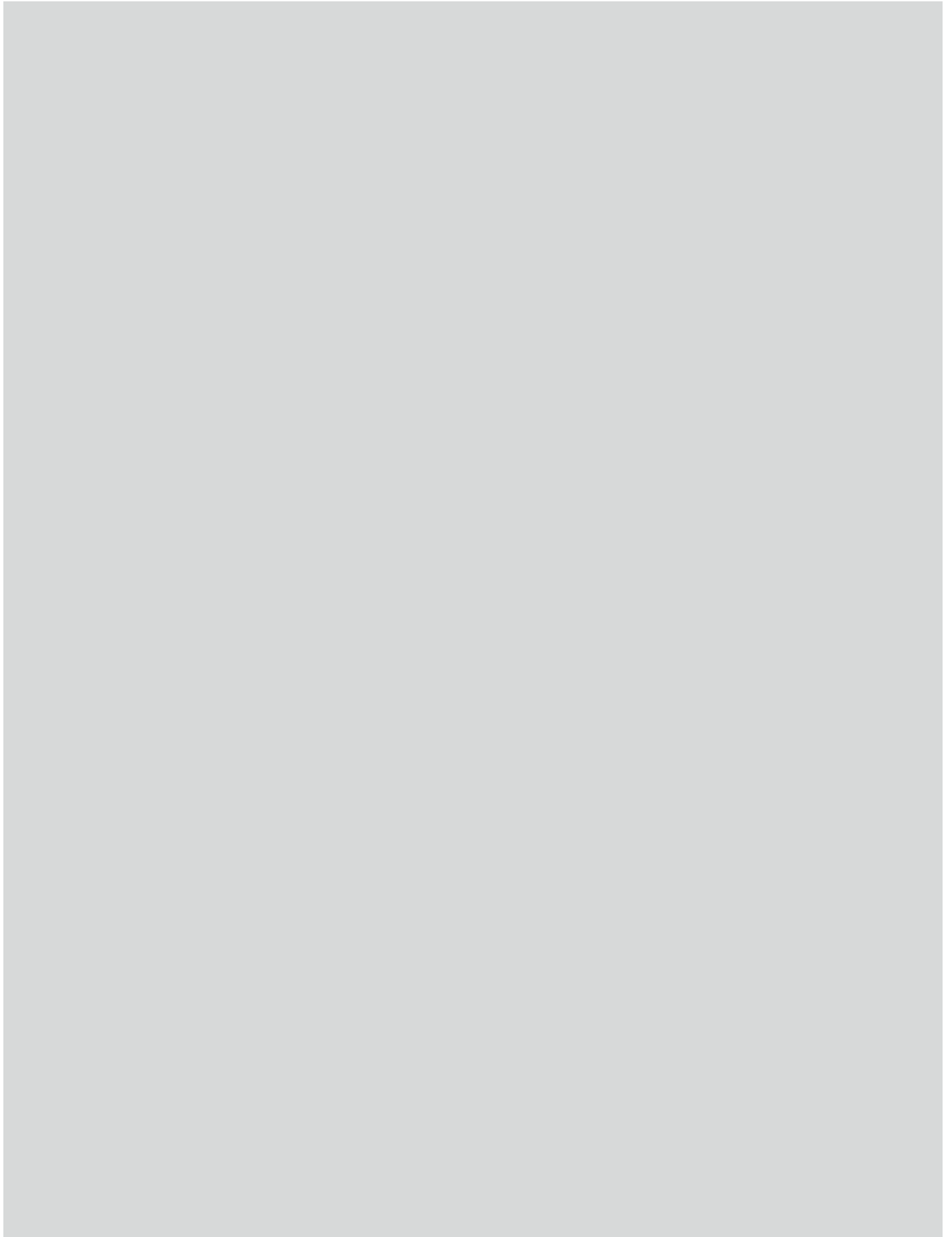




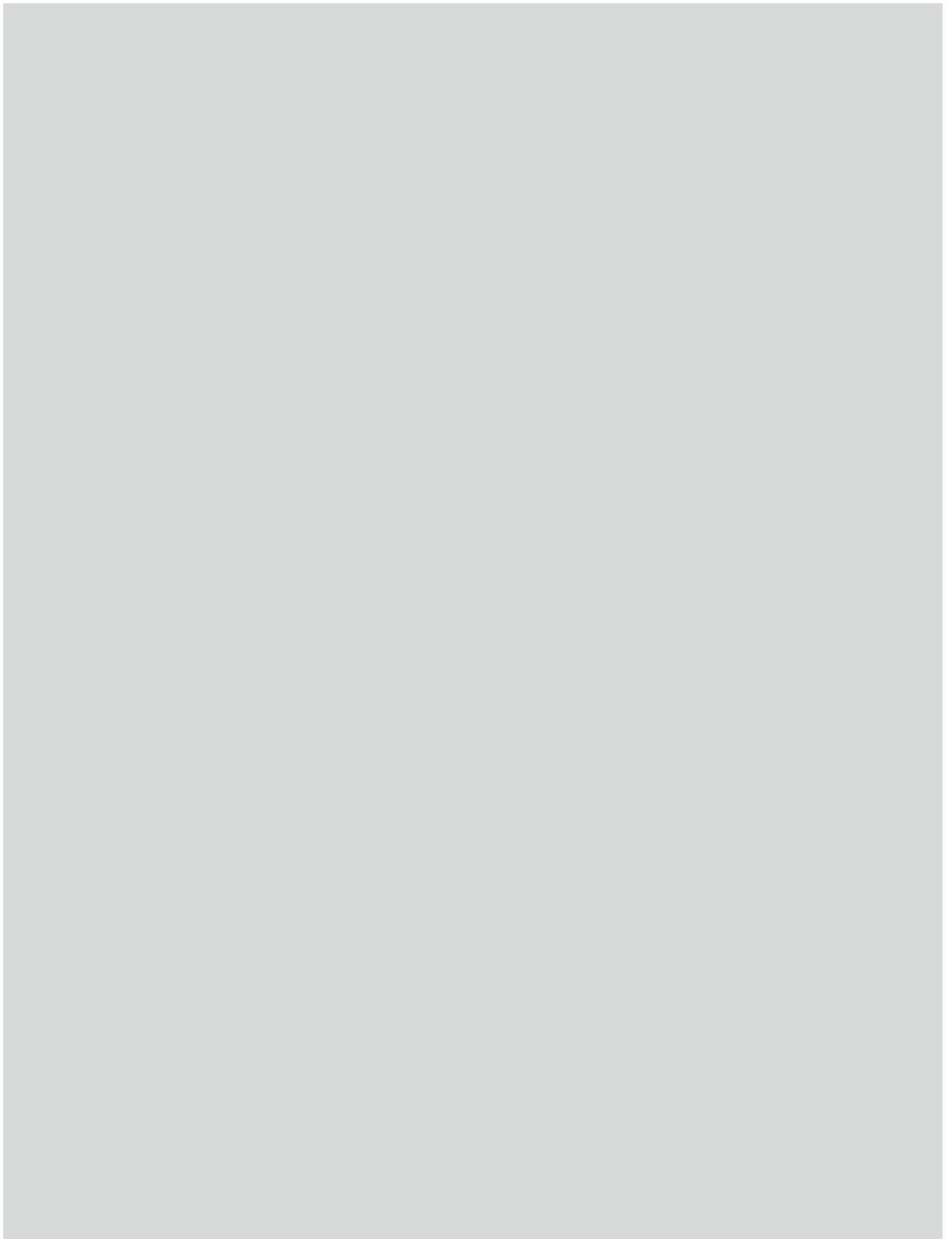
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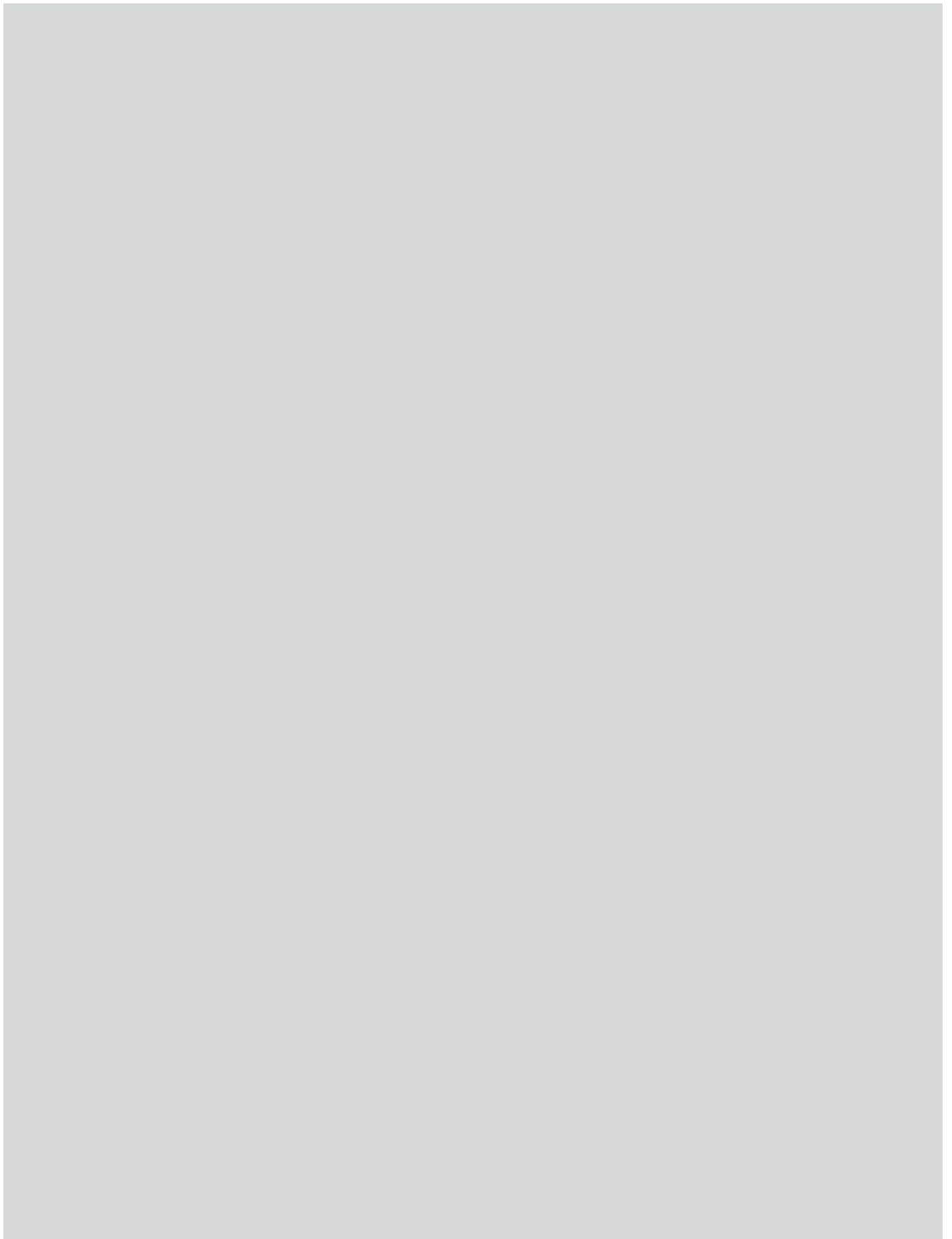
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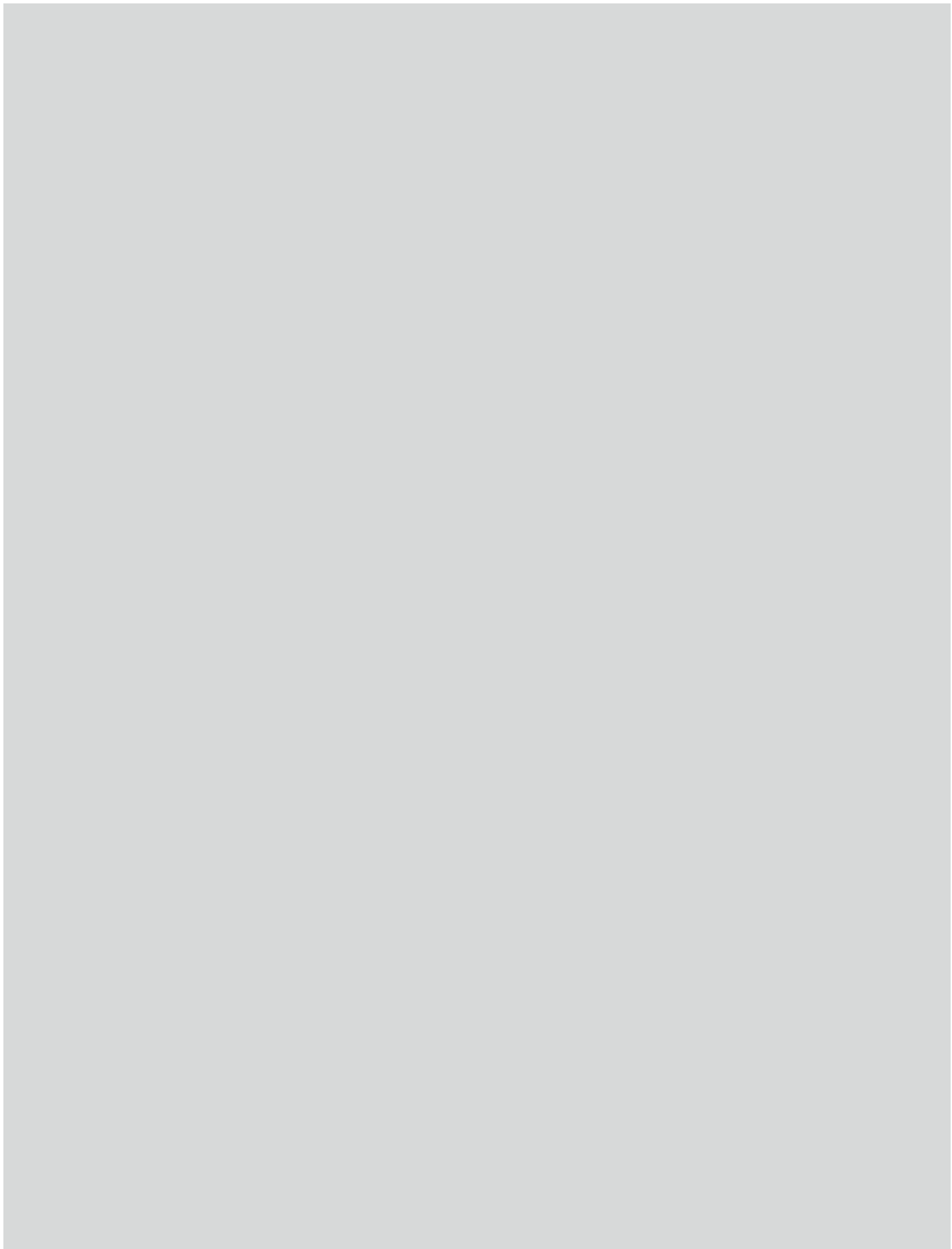
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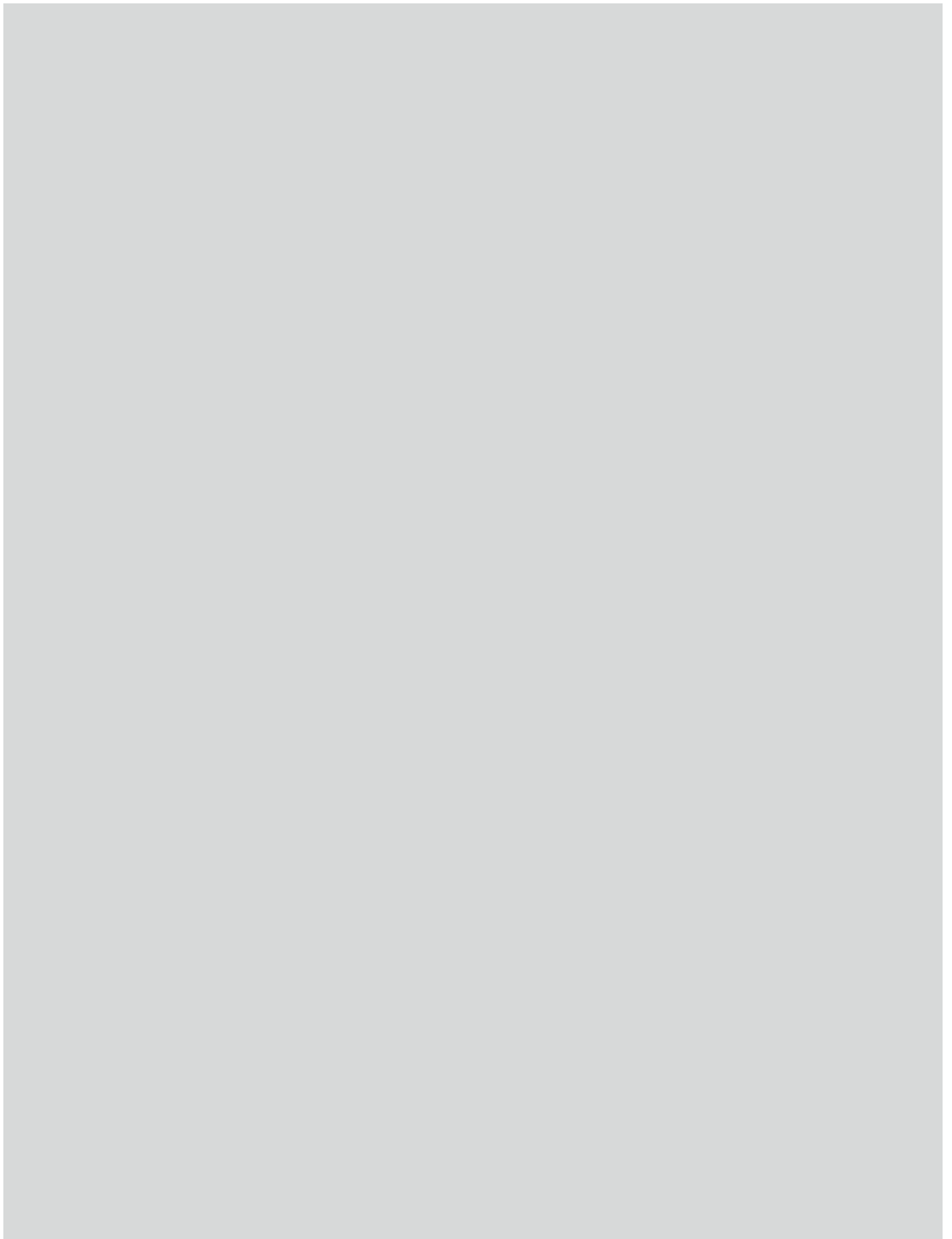
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# Shifting Your Values and Mindset

Becoming emotionally available often requires a shift in values and mindset. By challenging ingrained beliefs, you can create more space for deeper emotional connections.

## Valuing Vulnerability (and Self-Protection)

Vulnerability is a requirement for fostering deep emotional connections with others.

When you share your vulnerabilities, fears, and insecurities, it allows others to see the real you. This authenticity creates an environment where meaningful connection can thrive.

Valuing vulnerability and self-protection may initially seem contradictory, but it's possible to find a healthy balance between the two. Here are some strategies to help you value vulnerability while maintaining self-protection.

### *Understand the Importance of Vulnerability*

Recognize that vulnerability is not a weakness, but a courageous act of authenticity and emotional openness.

Understand that allowing yourself to be vulnerable fosters intimacy and growth in relationships, and acknowledge the potential rewards that vulnerability can bring.

**Video Break:** TED Talk: [The Power of Vulnerability](#) by Brené Brown

**Recommended Book:** [The Power of Vulnerability](#) by Brené Brown

### *Reflect on Past Experiences*

Reflect on your past experiences where vulnerability may have led to positive outcomes or strengthened your relationships.

Remember moments where you felt understood, supported, and emotionally connected because you allowed yourself to be vulnerable. Use these experiences as reminders that vulnerability can be a catalyst for growth and intimacy.

### *Start Small and Gradually Increase Vulnerability*

Take gradual steps towards vulnerability rather than diving in all at once. Start by sharing your thoughts and emotions in small, safe situations and gauge the response you receive.

As you build trust and confidence, gradually increase your level of vulnerability, allowing for deeper emotional connections to develop over time.

### *Practice Self-Compassion*

Be kind to yourself throughout the process of embracing vulnerability. Understand that vulnerability can sometimes lead to disappointment or hurt, but that doesn't diminish your worth or invalidate your efforts.

Practice self-compassion by acknowledging your courage and resilience, and by nurturing yourself during vulnerable moments.



*“You are imperfect,  
you are wired for  
struggle, but you  
are worthy of love  
and belonging.”*

*- Brené Brown*



## Valuing Interdependence (and Independence)

Similarly, valuing both interdependence and independence is crucial for fostering healthy relationships. Here are some strategies to help you strike a balance between the two.

### *Recognize the Benefits of Interdependence*

Understand that interdependence is not the same as dependence or losing your sense of self.

Benefits of interdependence include: shared experiences, emotional support, collaboration, and personal growth through connections with others.

Appreciate the opportunities for mutual learning and growth that interdependence can offer.

### *Focus on Cultivating Healthy Boundaries*

Healthy boundaries allow you to maintain your autonomy and protect your personal space, while also fostering a sense of safety and respect within your relationships.

With healthy boundaries, each partner maintains a level of independence while also being able to rely on and support each other. It prevents one person from becoming overly dependent or enmeshed, allowing for a healthier and more equal partnership.

Recommended Article: [4 Real-Life Examples of How to Set Boundaries](#)

### *Focus on Similarities*

Overemphasizing differences between yourself and others is a way to maintain emotional distance. This thinking often prevents you from recognizing commonalities and shared experiences that could foster deeper connections.

When you focus on similarities, you create a greater sense of connection with others. It also helps you notice the common interests, goals, or values that can be pursued together.

### *Foster Empathy and Understanding*

Cultivate empathy and understanding towards others. Recognize that everyone has their own perspectives, experiences, and needs, and adopt an attitude of curiosity. As Carl Jung said: "Everyone you meet knows something you don't know but need to know. Learn from them."

Practice putting yourself in others' shoes, seeking to understand their feelings and motivations. This fosters a sense of connection and promotes interdependence by nurturing mutual respect and compassion.

### *Practice Gratitude for Interdependence*

Develop a sense of gratitude for the interdependence that exists in your relationships and connections. Reflect on the ways in which others contribute to your life, support you, and bring value. Express appreciation to cultivate a more positive mindset around interdependence.

Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) can help you cultivate gratitude for interdependence. Find out more about it in [this article](#).



## What If I Strongly Value Independence?

In today's society, there's often a strong emphasis on romantic relationships as the ideal or expected norm. However, it's important to recognize the validity of valuing singlehood.

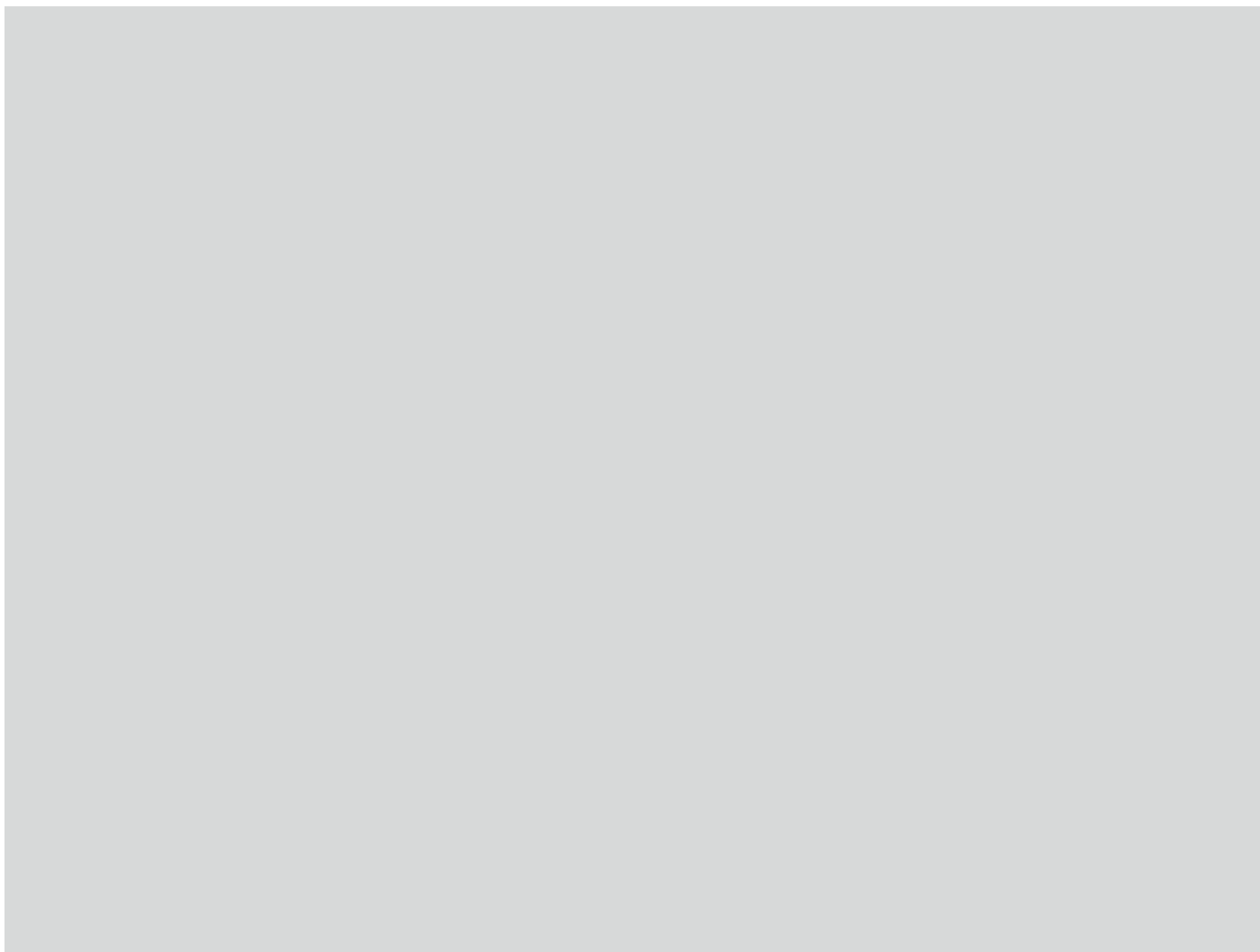
Society often portrays being in a romantic relationship as a marker of success, happiness, and fulfillment. This can create external pressures that may make you question your own desires and inadvertently lead you to believe that being single is somehow inadequate or undesirable.

By taking the time to reflect on your motivations, you can gain clarity and ensure that your desire for a relationship is driven by your own genuine needs and aspirations rather than societal expectations.

**Video Break:** [What No One Ever Told You About People Who Are Single](#) By Bella Depaulo

### Journal Prompts

- In what ways is interdependency currently enhancing my life? In what ways could I envisage it enhancing my life in future?
- What are my reasons for wanting a relationship? Are they driven by societal expectations, personal desires, or a combination of both? How do I envision a relationship enhancing my life?
- Have I explored and developed my own interests, passions, and goals outside of a romantic relationship? How fulfilled am I in pursuing my own individual path?



# Valuing Emotions (and Logic)

Does this sound like you?

- *“Emotions are overrated. I should just focus on logic and practical matters.”*
- *“It’s not a big deal. I should just brush it off and move on.”*
- *“I’m being needy if I ask for support or reassurance. I should just deal with it on my own.”*

Minimization of emotional needs involves downplaying or dismissing one’s own emotional needs, often as a defense mechanism to avoid vulnerability or dependency on others. Doing this excessively can lead to emotional isolation and a sense of disconnection from others.

Valuing both emotions and logic is essential for holistic decision-making and overall wellbeing. How to start valuing your emotions more? Here are some ideas.

## *Increase Your Emotional Awareness*

Begin by developing a [greater awareness of your emotions](#). Pay attention to how you feel in different situations, and learn to identify and label your emotions. This self-awareness enables you to acknowledge and value your emotional experiences.

## *Recognize the Importance of Emotions*

Understand that emotions serve a purpose and provide valuable information about your needs, desires, and boundaries. Emotions can offer insights and guide you in making decisions that align with your values and overall wellbeing.

## *Practice Emotional Acceptance*

Allow yourself to fully experience and accept your emotions without judgment. Embrace the idea that emotions are natural and valid, regardless of whether they’re positive or negative. Give yourself permission to feel and honour your emotional responses.

## *Validate Others’ Emotions*

Extend your appreciation for emotions beyond yourself and validate the emotions of others. Listen empathetically, seek to understand their perspectives, and acknowledge the validity of their feelings.

## Notes and Reflections



# Values Pros and Cons Reflections

Considering the pros and cons of different values can provide a deeper insight into your core beliefs and desires, helping you identify your personal growth aspirations and contributing to a more intentional way of living.

## Vulnerability

Pros

Cons

## Self-Protection

Pros

Cons

## Interdependence

Pros

Cons

## Independence

Pros

Cons

## Emotions

Pros

Cons

## Logic

Pros

Cons



# Cultivating Optimism About Love

A lack of optimism about love can have significant implications for your emotional availability. If you lack optimism, you may expect negative outcomes or disappointment in relationships. This can lead you to become emotionally guarded, preventing you from fully connecting with others. Here are some ways to cultivate a stronger sense of optimism about love.

## *Avoid Relationship Comparisons*

Understanding that not all relationships are the same is crucial. It's especially important to refrain from forming judgments about love based on relationships with people who lack the drive for personal growth.

Sustaining healthy long-term relationships requires effort, and individuals who neglect to invest in nurturing themselves and their relationship are significantly less likely to succeed in doing so.

## *Surround Yourself With Positive Influences*

Try to surround yourself with people who have a positive outlook on love and healthy relationships. Engage in conversations that promote optimism, support, and encouragement. Seek out role models or mentors who embody the attitudes you aspire to have in your own love life.

## *Focus on Growth*

View relationships as opportunities for personal growth, learning, and self-discovery. Embrace the idea that each relationship, regardless of its outcome, can teach you valuable lessons and contribute to your overall personal development.

## *Avoid Idealizing Partners*

Holding excessively high standards for potential partners or relationships keeps others at arm's length by perpetuating unrealistic expectations. By focusing on other people's (inevitable) flaws, you maintain emotional distance and avoid getting close.

This reinforces emotional unavailability and an unhelpful narrative around love. Consequently, you may subconsciously sabotage potential connections or dismiss people who could have offered you genuine love and support.

## *Identify Cognitive Distortions*

Emotionally unavailable people often engage in cognitive distortions that reinforce unhelpful beliefs about relationships.

Challenging these thinking patterns helps to cultivate a more optimistic mindset about love.

For a deeper dive into how to recognise and deal with cognitive distortions, be sure to check out *The Thinking Slow Method* in [The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit](#).

## *Cultivate Curiosity to Avoid Projecting*

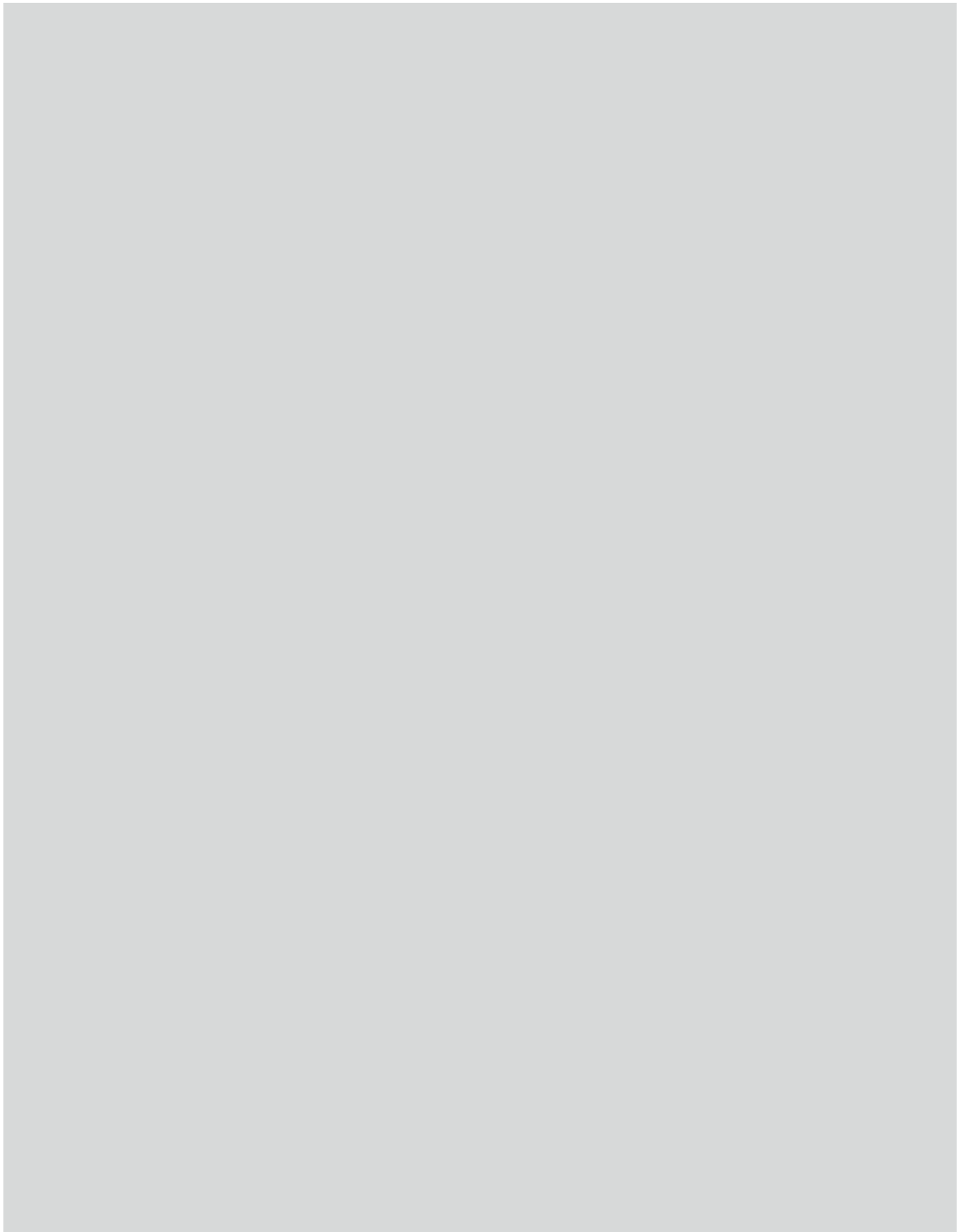
Cultivating curiosity allows you to approach new relationships and people with a fresh perspective. By refraining from projecting past experiences onto present partners, you create



space for a deeper connection.

### Journal Prompt

- How could I cultivate optimism about love? Explore possible ways forward.



# Improving Your Communication Skills

Strive to express your emotions, needs, and desires clearly and honestly with others.

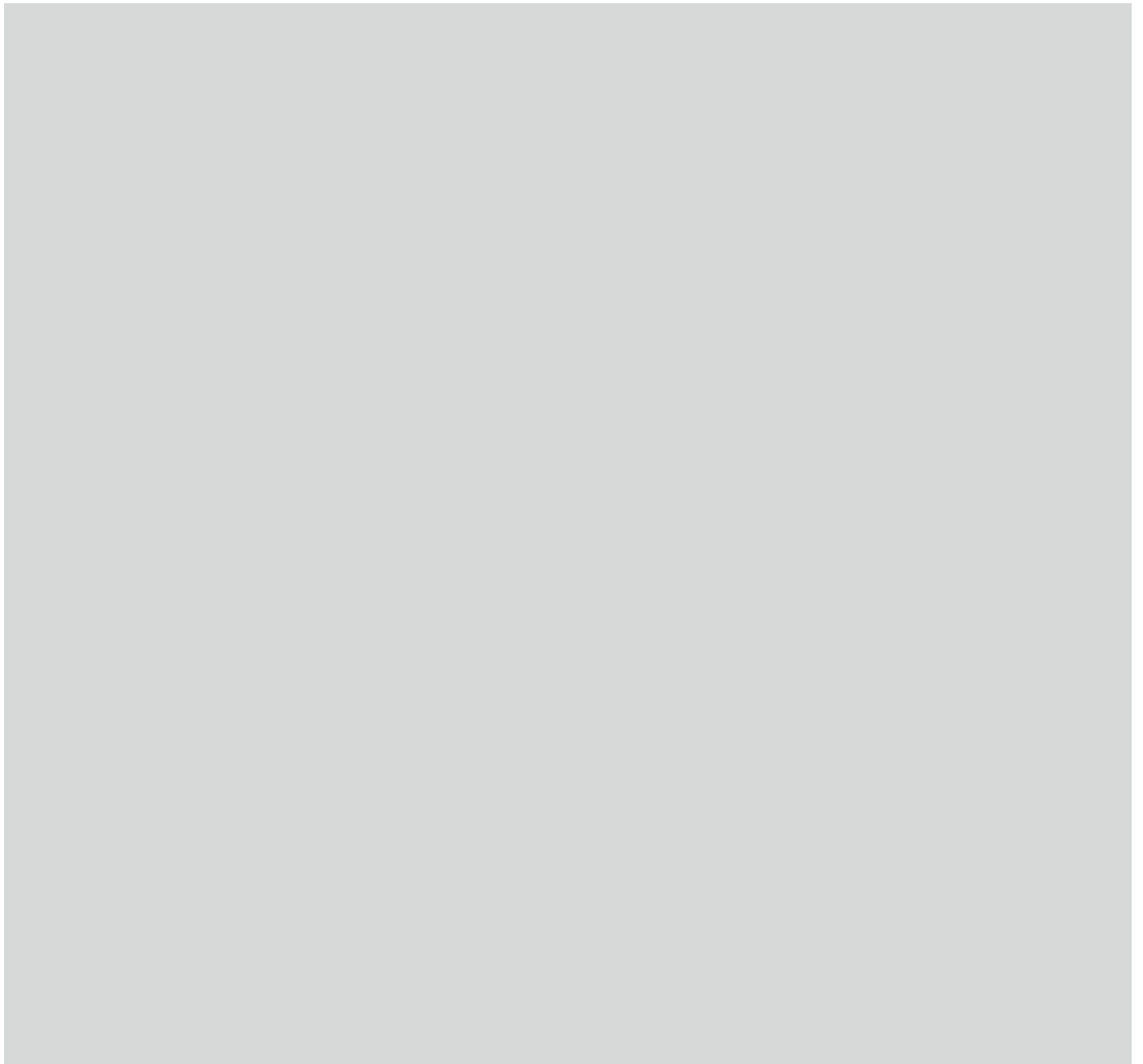
Effective communication promotes understanding and allows for deeper emotional connections.

Be willing to engage in conversations that may be uncomfortable but necessary for building emotional intimacy and trust, and aim to do these conversations in person.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a communication framework developed by psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg that can help you with this. It focuses on resolving conflicts and fostering understanding (without resorting to harmful behaviours such as [stonewalling](#)) through a 4-step process. [The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit](#) includes practical NVC worksheets.

## Journal Prompt

- How could I improve my communication skills? Explore possible ways forward.



# Building Self-Esteem

There are many ways you can boost your self-esteem, for example:

- Work on your [positive self-talk](#).
- Identify your strengths and talents – here’s a free [Character Strengths Test](#). Find opportunities to apply your strengths in different areas of your life, and pay attention to them.
- Seek out relationships and social connections with people who are supportive, encouraging, and accepting. Positive relationships can provide emotional support, validation, and feedback that contributes to improved self-esteem.
- Invest in your personal growth. Set realistic and achievable goals using practical tools such as [The Life Balance Wheel and The GROW Planner](#).
- Using affirmations: [here’s a list](#).
- Improve your [assertiveness skills](#).

Enhancing self-esteem fosters a heightened sense of self-worth and self-respect. This cultivates healthier relationships through the establishment of improved boundaries – you develop discernment around what you will and won’t accept.

With better self-esteem, you’ll develop a greater understanding of your worth and recognize your right to be treated with respect, kindness, and consideration. Consequently, you’ll become more adept at filtering out emotionally unavailable people.

## Journal Prompt

- How could I improve my self-esteem? Explore possible ways forward.





## Focusing on Self-Discovery

Another way to build your self-esteem – and overcome codependent tendencies – is to spend time focusing on self-discovery. Self-discovery refers to the process of exploring and gaining insight into one's own identity, values, interests, beliefs and desires.

This process helps you develop a stronger sense of self-identity. You'll gain a clearer understanding of who you are as a person, independent of your relationships. Here are some ways to focus on self-discovery:

- Try new activities, hobbies, or classes to expand your horizons and discover new passions. Step outside your comfort zone and engage in activities you've always wanted to try.
- Similarly, if you relate to the stimulation seeking theory, how can you channel this in a healthy way (e.g., by seeking adventure and novelty through new hobbies, projects or friendships)?
- Get comfortable spending time alone. Use this time to reflect, recharge, and reconnect with yourself, free of distractions.
- Reflect on your values and examine whether they align with your actions and priorities in life.
- Explore your desires. What does your ideal life look like?
- Take personality assessments like the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator \(MBTI\)](#) or the [Enneagram](#) to gain insights into your personality traits and areas for growth.
- Explore books on personal growth, psychology, spirituality, or philosophy, which can offer insights that facilitate self-reflection and personal development.

### Journal Prompt

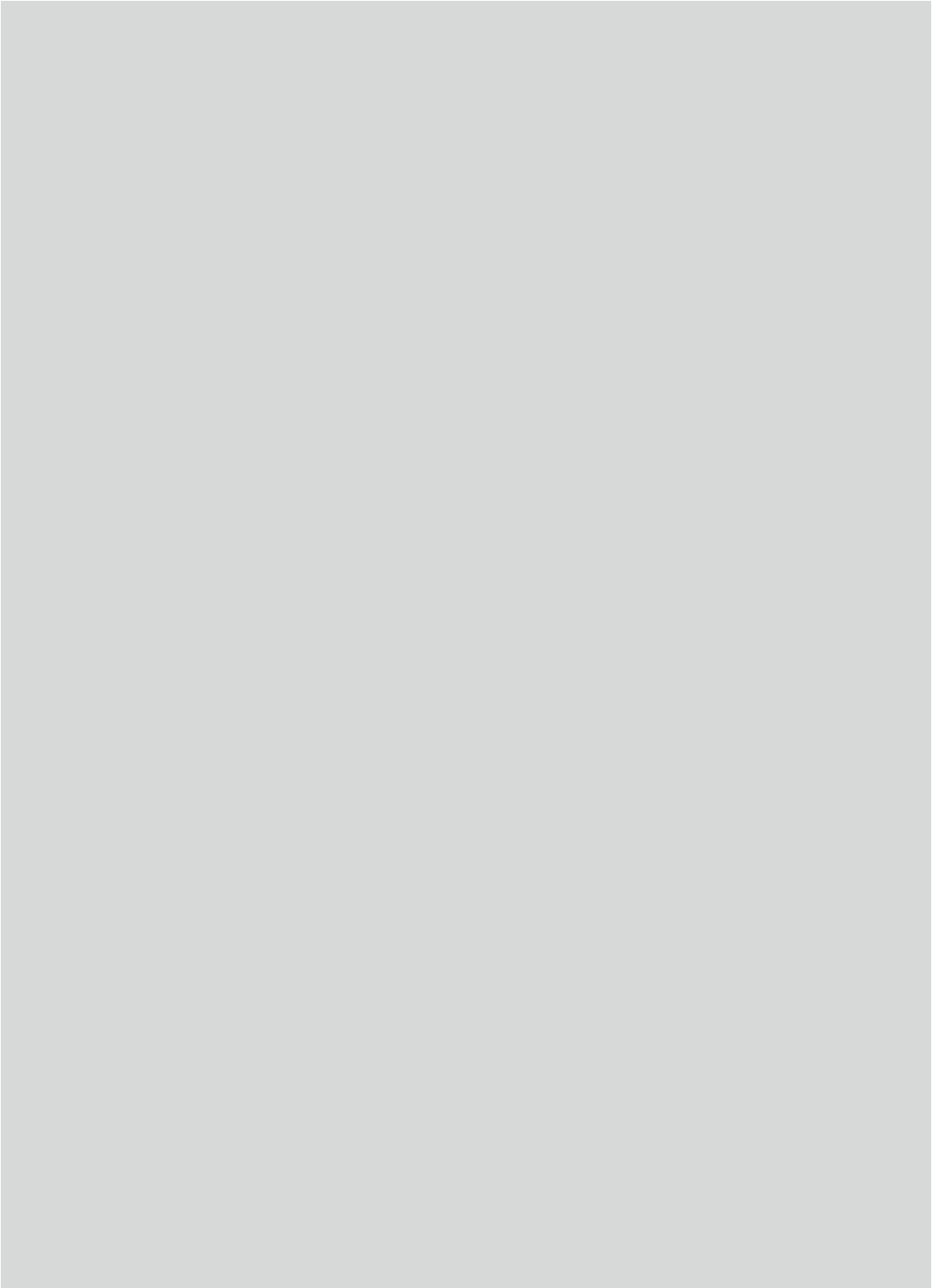
- How could I focus on self-discovery? Explore possible ways forward.



# Additional Notes and Reflections

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## Additional Notes and Reflections



# Additional Notes and Reflections

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# PART FOUR

## *Making Changes*

—

# Food for Thought: The Top Five Regrets of the Dying

In her book [The Top Five Regrets of the Dying](#), Bronnie Ware shares the insights she gained from working with people on their deathbeds.

The top five regrets people expressed were:

- **Not Expressing Feelings and Emotions.** They wished they'd been more open and honest with their loved ones, instead of keeping their thoughts and emotions bottled up inside. Many felt they'd missed opportunities to mend relationships or show love and appreciation.
- **Not Living a Life True to Oneself.** Many people realized, when it was too late, that they'd lived their lives based on the expectations and opinions of others, rather than pursuing their own dreams and desires.
- **Working Too Much.** Another regret was dedicating too much time and energy to work at the expense of personal relationships and enjoyment of life.
- **Failing to Maintain Friendships.** They realized the importance of nurturing and maintaining friendships, and regretted not investing enough time and effort into these relationships.
- **Not Allowing Happiness.** They felt that they'd allowed external circumstances and unhelpful thinking to hinder their experience of joy and contentment.

## Notes and Reflections



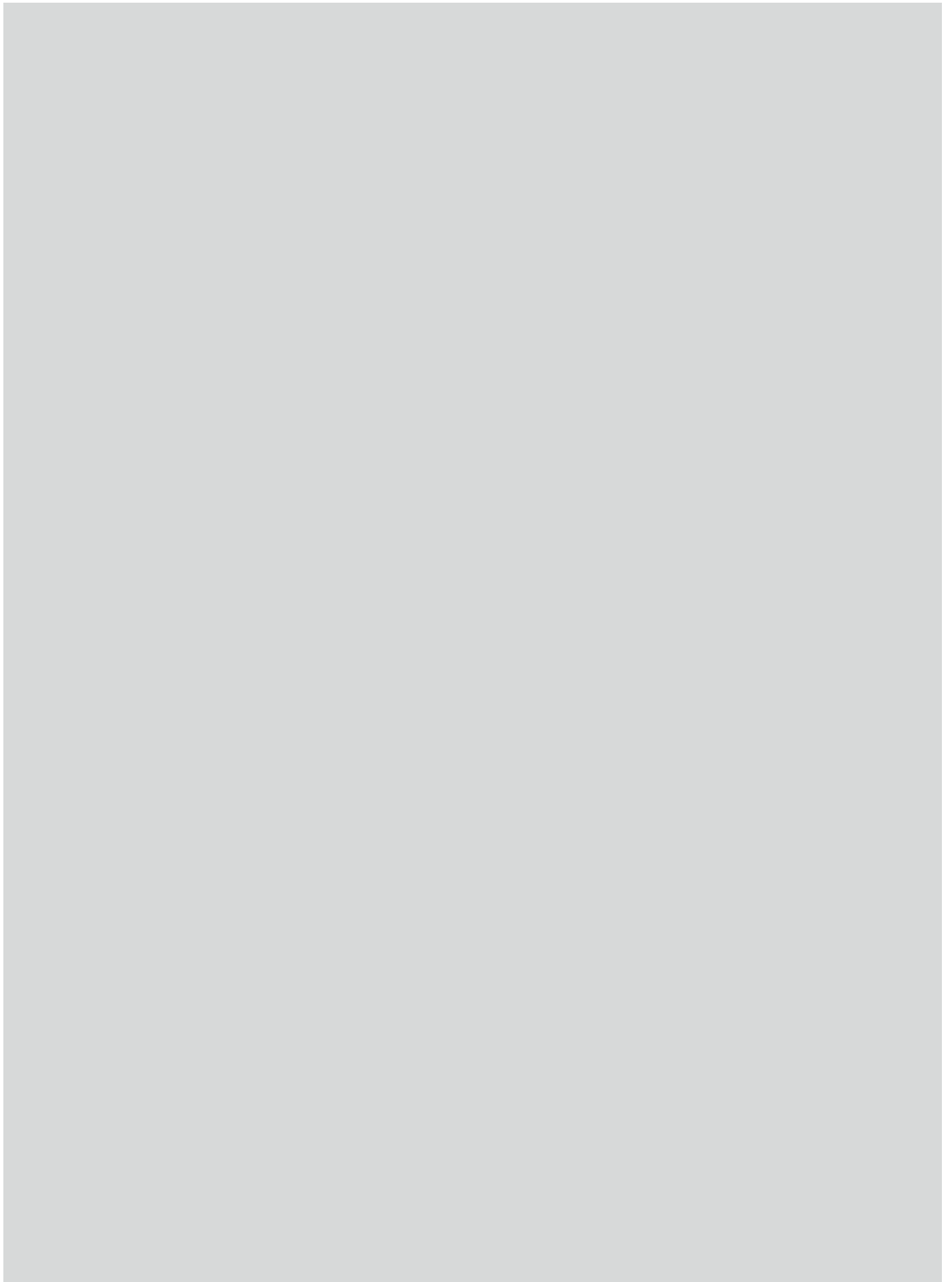
# My Emotional Availability Action Plan

Review the parts of this journal that felt the most important for you and compile your Emotional Availability Action Plan. Be sure to set reminders where necessary and plan regular check-ins to track your progress.

Action Step	When?	Done



## Tracking Progress: Past Actions List





## 8 Signs You're Becoming More Emotionally Available

- 1. Improved Communication.** You start expressing your thoughts, feelings, and emotions more openly and honestly.
- 2. Vulnerability.** You become more willing to share your vulnerabilities, fears, and insecurities with others, allowing for a deeper level of emotional connection.
- 3. Prioritizing the Relationship.** You make an effort to prioritize your relationship and invest time, energy, and effort into its growth and development.
- 4. Consistency.** You display consistent and reliable behaviour, demonstrating that you can be counted on and are committed to building a healthy relationship.
- 5. Love Over Limerence.** You recognise the signs of limerence and pursue the relationship dynamics of healthy love.
- 6. Cultivating Self-Awareness.** You cultivate self-awareness through practices such as journaling and grow increasingly aware of your emotional needs, triggers, and patterns.
- 7. Personal Growth.** You proactively pursue self-improvement, using self-reflection, therapy, and other self-help tools that help you grow as a person.
- 8. Respect for Boundaries.** You respect other's personal boundaries and actively work on establishing and maintaining your own boundaries as well.

## Notes and Reflections



# Keep going, keep growing.

The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit can help you:

- ✓ Understand and challenge cognitive distortions
- ✓ Connect with your feelings and needs
- ✓ Deal with the fear of abandonment
- ✓ Learn strategies for managing intense emotions
- ✓ Improve your assertiveness skills
- ✓ Gain practical tools for boundary-setting
- ✓ Overcome overthinking

[Learn more](#)

