



UNLIMITED REVISIONS

What are the 4E's of Recovery?

Many women in toxic relationships seek to improve and sustain their relationship, however experts advise that nurturing oneself, by pursuing self-care and improved self esteem, is essential. Therapy can be helpful in this regard. The goal of this nurturing may seem counter-productive when you still are hoping to remain with your partner. The goal: to ensure one is ready to leave the relationship if necessary (Cory ND).

Prior to my separation, my self-esteem had eroded. I busied myself with my children and their activities, my job and keeping the household running smoothly. These were a welcome distraction from my hurt feelings and dread over the imminent tantrums, outbursts, arguments, smashed plates and thrown trophies. It was a test of endurance. I was sleep-deprived after countless nights agonizing over what more I could do to improve the marriage and the safety of the home for my children and me.

My therapy started unintentionally, but in hindsight, I readily concur with those experts: the counselling was a turning point. The key question that my therapist coaxed me to ask myself was: "What is it about me that makes me stay in a mean marriage?" This inspired self-study. I resumed journaling to focus on the aforementioned question and others including "Is it some kind of glitch?"

I pored over the questions and their answers. I analyzed, revised, researched, revised. The journal became a memoir and a pathway: The Unlimited Revisions (UR) Pathway and the 4E's of Recovery:

Enter

Excavate

Examine

Exit

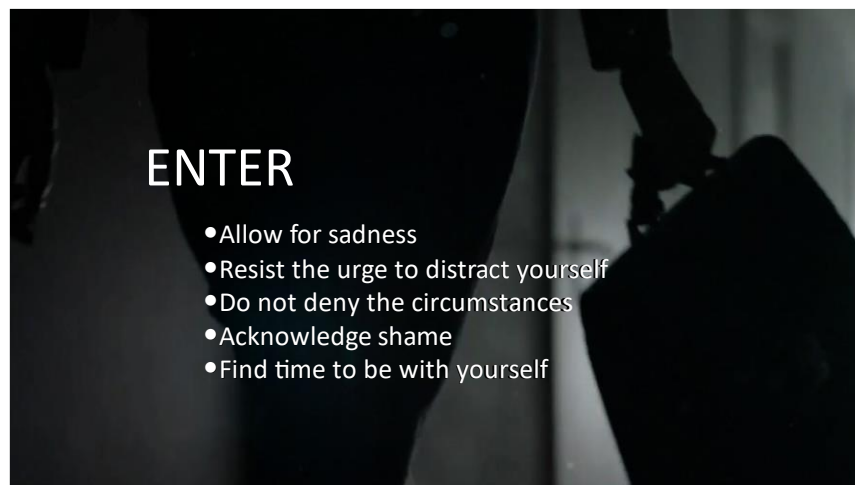
1. ENTER the Swamp of Shame:

Brene Brown (2010) refers to shame as the "swampland of the soul". When I heard her Ted Talk, the phrase resonated with me. It conjured a scary image; a place people fear to go. Decades before starting the self-study, I was aware of not wanting to be alone. I disliked silence, being able to hear my own thoughts, feel my heart's heaviness. They

were too scary. A trusted counsellor suggested I was trying to avoid sadness, and by this time, I was done with denial. I knew she was right.

My busyness, my plans, my children, my work, my social life and my fitness; they helped me pretend I was okay, helped me keep going. I achieved a lot, and am proud of all of it, don't get me wrong. However, as I barrelled along, I continued repeating history. All that achievement helped me succeed in denying my circumstances. I was not ready to admit that I was choosing to remain or contemplate the reasons for that choosing. Denial and anger, especially anger, were far more accessible and attractive than that scary swamp of sadness and the shame that was the source of my glitch.

I needed to allow myself to be alone. Alone with myself and my shame. And harder still: to allow the emotions to wash over me, allow myself to feel sadness. Really feel it. Not dip my toe in and make a hasty exit as I had done in the past. I relearned one of life's truths: anticipation of pain is usually worse than the pain itself. Like ripping off a bandaid. Brene says, "standing on the shore and catastrophizing" is much harder than actually getting to it (Brown, 2010).



2. EXCAVATE the Circumstances or Trauma:

Start digging. Find the circumstances, experiences, things done or not done. Lift them out. Shine a light on them. I didn't have to dig too hard to unearth the events that caused shame, that negatively impacted feelings of worthiness.

An important caveat about the word 'negative': it implies judgement – which is not appropriate where most childhood circumstances are concerned. For example, a child

born into a war-ravaged region, whose parent is absent. Who would fault the parent with the child's poor esteem? That parent did not cause the war. The same for the child whose family moves frequently, is isolated and stressed. The circumstances just "are". Blame or judgement is not justified or, more importantly, productive. However, acknowledging these circumstances and their impact with your grown-up brain can have a dramatic, positive and healing effect.

In my case, my family's military background and later adolescent circumstances (physical abuse, suicide and pregnancy) negatively influenced my feelings of worthiness. Combined, these made me desperate to connect, attach, belong. These drove me to chase a certain unavailable or abusive partner.

Holding these up to the light to see them better, see them for the first time, helped me realize self-compassion.

Later, I excavated mitigating circumstances that had a positive influence on my sense of worthiness. Such as my tight-knit military family, spiritual experiences, education, meeting my firstborn and the birth of my next two children.

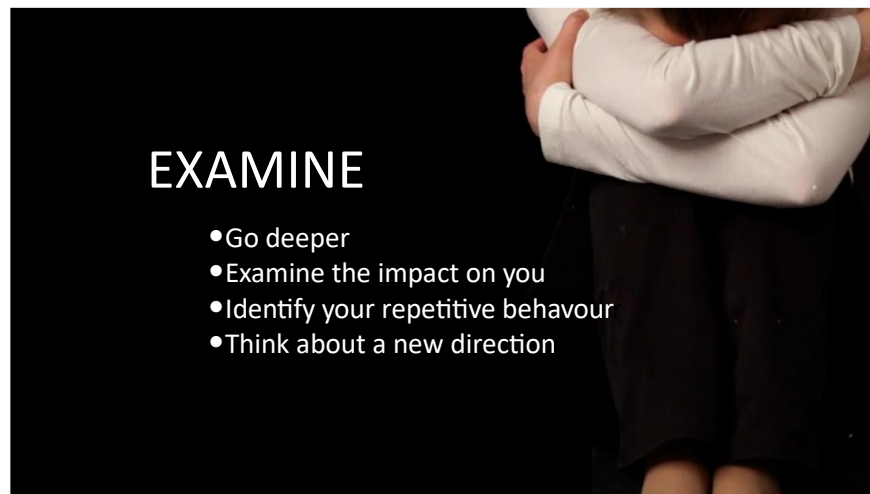


3. EXAMINE the Impact:

The child/adolescent adapts to their circumstance. This maladaptation produces the distorted thoughts and feelings that comprise 'the glitch'. Examine them, list them, name them. Trace a path from the circumstances to the named thoughts/behaviors. Some examples from my examination were: 'schmuckful' thoughts, the chasing, the "what-if", the paddling hard, the smoothing over. I put them under a microscope and peered at them closely. I consulted other experts (my daughter, counsellors, Brene

Brown, Gabor Mate, Raewyn Connell). I studied until I understood them well. At last, the flawed synapse could be tended to and repaired.

I was able to find a new direction, plot a new course, change my trajectory. I could think, say and do different. I could be specific, explicit about my expectations for the future, I could choose and name new thoughts and behaviors.



4. EXIT the Pathway:

I made some surprising discoveries prior to my exit. I learned more about the circumstances of others around me. This helped me to find more forgiveness and compassion for myself (another critical element for recovery). I concluded that self-compassion and forgiveness were not optional elements.

My biggest surprise was finding it for my partner, my abuser and others involved in the circumstances that negatively impacted me. I propose that this element may be less critical, and depending on the individual circumstances, less achievable.

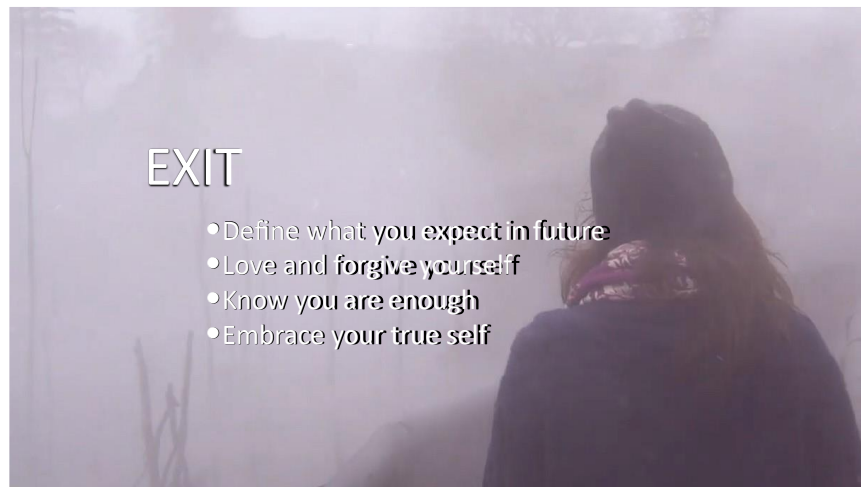
Upon exiting the pathway, one can lean into wholehearted living: the peace, bravery and confidence that come from being able to sincerely say, "I am enough. I am worthy of love and belonging."

With this new posture, one can embrace their true self. I spent more time in the swamp digging around, learning more about who I was, my quirks and the mitigating circumstances referred to earlier. I became truly grateful for all my past circumstances

and enjoyed the time I spent alone contemplating who I wanted to be, what I would and would not tolerate. I could be specific and explicit.

In the swamp, I learned to love my past self: that brave, impulsive teen; the woman who struggled with repetitive behaviors who also worked hard and raised children.

As for my glitch: recently I have become aware of it's potential to continue influencing me, especially in relationships. I am grateful for friends and counsellors for their guidance and willingness to continue the therapeutic conversation with me.



My name is Lori Holstein. I am the author of “UNLIMITED REVISIONS Exposing the Glitch: Confronting Female Complicity in Recovery from Toxic Relationships”. I published the book using a pseudonym to tell the story of Lorelie Friesen. To find out more:

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References

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[What is a Toxic Relationship? 8 Types of Toxic Relationships and Their Signs \(healthscopemag.com\)](http://healthscopemag.com)