

The Healing Compass— Your Emotional First Aid Kit for Recovering from Life's Wounds: *A Workbook*



Photo by Engin Akyurt

A guided workbook that helps you recognize what your emotional system needs when facing pain and teaches you how to respond with the right care.

Welcome!

Thank you for picking up this guide. This practice is designed to give you the tools and insights to respond to life's emotional setbacks with greater awareness, compassion, and resilience.

You might be wondering, *Why an emotional first aid kit?* Much like a physical injury, emotional wounds need attention and care to heal properly. Too often, we push through our pain, ignoring the need to pause, reflect, and heal. But just as we wouldn't ignore a physical injury, it's vital to stop, assess, and address our emotional needs when we're hurt. This booklet provides a structured approach to doing just that—helping you pause in difficult moments, ground yourself, acknowledge your emotions, and seek the right support for resolving the pain. This way, you won't have to carry lasting consequences.

This booklet reflects the teachings from my book, ***How Deep Is the Wound?***, which explores emotional pain, its impact on our lives, and pathways to recover from it. In *How Deep Is the Wound?*, I examine the complexities of emotional suffering and provide practical insights for distinguishing between deep trauma and painful experiences that, with proper care, can be processed and resolved.

As you work through this booklet, remember this key message: Healing begins with self-awareness and self-compassion. Whether you're navigating small emotional bumps or larger, more complex injuries, the tools in this guide—and the more complete insights found in *How Deep Is the Wound?*—will help you address the inevitable challenges we all encounter.

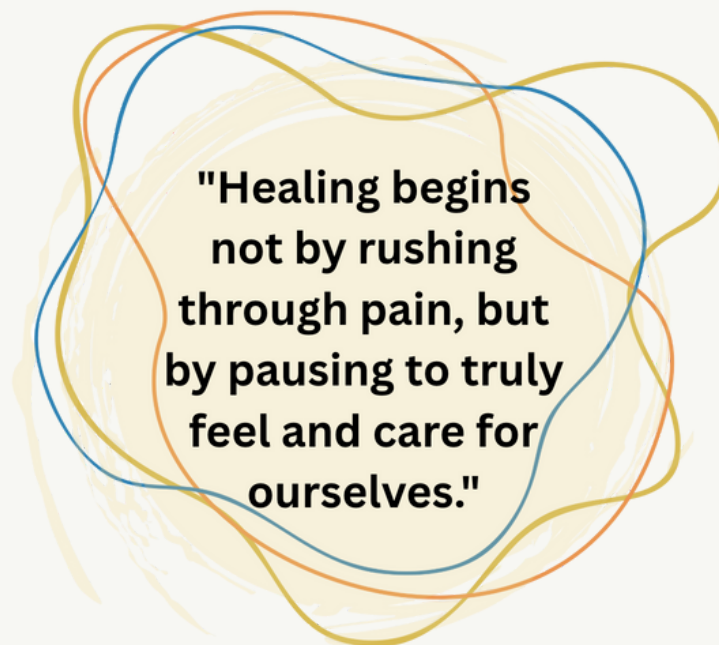
Take a deep breath, open your mind, and let's begin this journey of emotional awareness together.

Welcome to your emotional first aid kit!

Antonieta Contreras

CONTENTS

Introduction	04
Sarah's Wound	05
Foundational Information	08
Step-by-Step Guide to Emotional First Aid	09
The COMPASS Practice	11
The Power of Pausing	12
Worksheets for Reflection and Practice	13
Conclusion	21



How Deep is the Wound?

Antonieta Contreras

Introduction

The Importance of Emotional First Aid

Emotional injuries, like physical injuries, require immediate attention and care. In many situations, our instincts push us to rush through emotions, bypassing the chance to tend to them properly. The emotional first aid kit provides a structured approach to caring for your emotional health in moments of crisis, big or small.

How Emotional Injuries Affect Us

Emotional injuries are as real as physical ones, affecting not only your mind but your body too. In moments of emotional distress, the brain activates protective mechanisms, which can cloud our ability to think clearly. This guide is designed to help you manage and recover from these injuries, restoring clarity and balance.

A Brief Overview of Neuroscience Behind Emotional First Aid

When we experience stress, surprise, or hurt, the brain activates either adaptive or survival responses depending on the perceived severity of the situation. When we don't attend to our system's needs, the autonomic nervous system can shift into a state of heightened alertness and extreme measures. Pausing, grounding, and practicing self-compassion are all ways to signal to our system that we are safe, which helps bring us back to a calmer state and allows for clearer thinking and decision-making.

Sarah's Wound

Sarah was in the middle of a hectic day at work when she received a call from her sister. "Dad's in the hospital," her voice cracked through the phone. "It's not looking good."

A sharp pang of anxiety shot through Sarah's chest. She had had an argument with her father a couple of months ago over some hurtful remarks about her lifestyle. She hadn't said much, but since then, they hadn't spoken. That conversation had left her with a knot of unresolved feelings—resentment, confusion, and pain—that she hadn't dealt with. So, when she heard the news, it wasn't easy to digest. But instead of facing the emotions flooding her, she quickly pushed the thought aside. *"I'll deal with it later."* She had a deadline to meet. So, she did what she always did—kept working.

A few days later, Sarah got a text saying that her father was feeling better and would likely be discharged that day. It was Saturday, so she decided to go to the hospital that morning. When she entered his room, he looked at her, his eyes cold, and asked, *"Why are you here?"* *"Go away!"* He turned to the other side and ignored her for the rest of her visit.

Her heart felt like it was bleeding, her stomach knotted, and her mind swirled with confusion and emotional pain. She didn't know what to say or how to react. But instead of acknowledging the hurt, she buried it deep inside, thinking that with time, she could get back to normal.

As the days passed, Sarah's body started to betray her. Her shoulders stiffened, her jaw clenched, and headaches began to form. Nightmares and anxious sweats disturbed her sleep. Her mood shifted, and insecurities crept in. But she ignored it all. She went back to work, buried in her tasks. She had lived under the belief that emotions would take care of themselves with time, that hurt only made her weak, and that it wasn't worth acknowledging the turmoil inside. Emotions, she thought, were just distractions.

The truth was, Sarah didn't know how to pause and give herself the attention she needed. Not really. She had learned to keep moving, to ignore subtle signals of discomfort, and to dismiss the emotional turmoil inside. We only discovered recently that emotions that don't directly involve anticipated threats cause pain through somatic responses (such as heartache, stomach knots, etc.).

Like many of us, she had never learned to prioritize her emotional health, always putting it off for later. And, like many of us, she would have to pay the price—without even knowing that she could have avoided the lasting consequences by simply giving herself the space to attend to the wound.

Isn't it strange how we don't apply the same mindset to physical injuries as we do to emotional ones?

When we cut ourselves, we don't hesitate. We don't keep working through the pain. We stop. We assess the injury. We clean the wound. We apply bandages—even if it's just a small scrape. We provide it the attention it needs, no matter how minor it may seem. We know that if we don't take care of it, the wound will only get worse.

Emotional injuries deserve the same care and attention. But instead, we often do the opposite. We rush through the pain, dismiss our emotions, or push them down until they become overwhelming. We avoid taking the necessary pause to assess what we're feeling, to process it, and to give ourselves the space to heal.

The moment Sarah received the news about her father, she needed to create that emotional first aid moment. When Sarah arrived at the hospital and was rejected again, her emotional wound deepened, demanding even more attention. She needed to pause—just like she would if she had been physically harmed—but instead, she ignored the pain, pushed forward, and convinced herself that the pressure of work was more important than her emotional health.

Days later, Sarah found herself physically drained, overwhelmed, and emotionally detached. She hadn't taken the time to care for her emotional state, and it showed. Her body and mind were on the brink of exhaustion, and it became increasingly difficult to keep moving forward. The emotional wound remained open, steadily undermining not only her emotional well-being but her physical health as well.

Reflection: The Emotional First Aid Kit

I invite you to think of your emotional wounds the same way you think about physical injuries. If you had a cut on your hand, you wouldn't ignore it. You wouldn't rush back into work without cleaning it or applying a bandage. You'd stop, assess, and care for it. So, please treat your emotional wounds the same way. I'll tell you how.

An emotional first aid kit gives you the tools to pause and check in with yourself before things feel overwhelming. It helps you stop, ground yourself, acknowledge your feelings, and offer self-compassion—just like you would with a physical injury.

Sarah's experience is a reminder that emotional care should never be put off. When life's challenges hit us, it's important to take that moment to attend to ourselves, giving our emotional wounds the priority they deserve. By doing so, we avoid letting our brain assume we are lost and helpless, allowing us to heal with clarity and strength.



Photo by: Kaboompics.com

Foundational Information from Neuroscience

How Emotions Impact the Brain and Nervous System

Daily challenges trigger the brain to anticipate and respond based on what it has learned, preparing the body to confront perceived threats. These reactions activate emotions that send signals throughout the system, prompting action—whatever is necessary to ensure safety. However, emotions that arise from pain without a clear or anticipated threat work differently. Much like receiving a punch, we feel the pain directly in our system. This pain is also sending a signal that something needs attention.

Pain signals—whether physical or emotional—serve as indicators that something requires attention, activating areas of the brain involved in emotional processing.

The anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), for instance, is involved in emotional conflict and helps navigate the discomfort caused by emotions that don't involve fear. It helps with self-regulation, so if you experience emotional pain like sadness or disappointment, it helps you make sense of those feelings in a way that doesn't activate a threat response.

Similarly, when emotional pain arises from something like loss, failure, or rejection, the prefrontal cortex works to help make sense of the situation and evaluate the context, helping you process them rather than react impulsively.

If we don't attend to that pain, the brain may interpret our inaction as a threat, triggering a state of heightened alertness. This ongoing state of alertness consumes significant amounts of energy, leading to both emotional and physical exhaustion as the system attempts to avoid a threat that does not even exist.

Attending to the emotional wound helps resolve the pain and shifts the body back into a calmer, more focused state where rational thinking prevails.

The Power of Pausing

Emotional wounds, like physical ones, need care and attention to heal properly. It's easy to rush through pain, to ignore the discomfort and move on quickly—but this often leaves us with lasting scars.

Healing or resolution doesn't come from pushing through. They come from pausing, acknowledging what we feel, and giving ourselves the space to truly process and recover. Just as we would tend to a physical injury, we must tend to our emotions with patience, compassion, and mindfulness.

The greatest gift we can give ourselves in times of distress is the space to recover strength—not just to 'move on.'

Step-by-Step Guide to Emotional First Aid

I. Stop the Bleeding — Pausing to Create Space

In emotionally charged moments, the instinct is often to either overreact or suppress our feelings. To better resolve the situation, the first step is to pause and give yourself space, which helps prevent further damage. Stay quiet and still for a moment, reorient yourself, count to ten, take deep breaths, or briefly remove yourself from the situation.

II. Come Back to Your Senses — Grounding Yourself

When your mind is racing or overwhelmed, grounding techniques redirect your attention to physical sensations, helping your nervous system recognize that you're safe in this moment. Feel your feet on the ground, breathe deeply, or notice the sensory information around and within you. This helps settle the nervous system and anchors you in the here and now.

III. Clean the Wound — Acknowledging Your Feelings

Notice, recognize, and name the emotions you're experiencing. Acknowledging feelings like fear, anger, or sadness allows you to begin processing them. This is an essential step in preparing for emotional healing, much like cleaning a wound before it can properly heal.

IV. Apply a Bandage — Immediate Support

Once you have paused and identified your feelings, provide support to yourself. This could mean calling a friend, journaling, or simply sitting quietly and patiently until you feel more settled. The key is offering yourself comfort without seeking to fix the situation prematurely.

V. Decide What Kind of Help You Need — Reflect and Choose Help

After the initial reaction settles, assess what kind of help would be most useful. This could be emotional support, practical assistance, or simply time alone. Avoid reacting impulsively or rushing to please others. Take a moment to notice what you need and decide what will best support your recovery from the situation.

VI. Protect Yourself from Infection — Self-Compassion

Avoid negative self-talk and criticism. Offer yourself the same kindness you would offer a friend in distress. This can prevent emotional "infection"—such as guilt or shame—which can prolong the healing process.

VII. Reflect and Integrate — Learning from the Experience

Once the crisis is over and you feel more in control, reflect on what happened and how you responded. What have you learned? How can you use this experience to be better prepared in the future? This step is essential for transforming pain into growth, just as you would use a past injury as a lesson for future prevention.

The COMPASS Practice

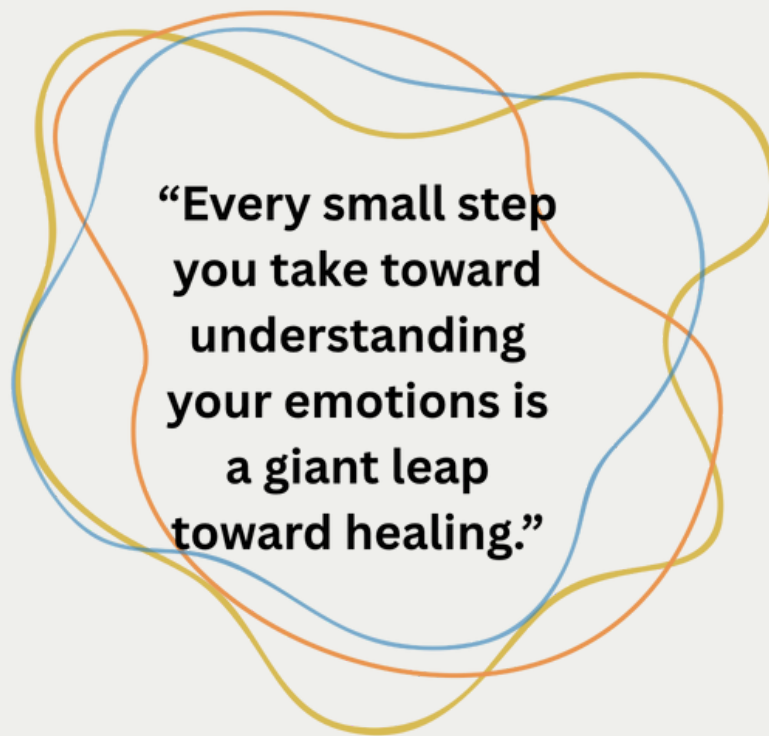
The COMPASS acronym serves as a daily check-in tool to maintain emotional health.

- C** Calm yourself (pause and create space)
- O** Orient to present (ground and return to your senses)
- M** Mention your feelings (acknowledge/name your emotions)
- P** Prioritize your needs (consider your needs first)
- A** Ask for appropriate help (help)
- S** Show self-kindness (practice self-compassion)
- S** Summarize lessons & be aware (learn/grow from the experience)



WORKSHEETS

These worksheets are your space to get curious about your emotional patterns and experiment with responses that serve you better. Think of each question as an invitation to understand yourself more deeply and grow from your experiences.



How Deep is the Wound?

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Worksheets for Reflection and Practice

Worksheet 1: Emotional Wound Awareness

This worksheet will help you reflect on how you typically respond to emotional wounds—whether you even recognize them and how your usual responses might affect your emotional and physical well-being.

Do you notice when you are emotionally wounded? Examples might include feeling hurt, rejected, disappointed, overwhelmed, or sad.

When you feel emotionally hurt, do you acknowledge it? What kind of emotional experiences do you tend to avoid or dismiss? Examples might include sadness, anger, guilt, fear, frustration, etc.

Worksheets for Reflection and Practice

Worksheet 1: Emotional Wound Awareness (continuation)

When you experience emotional pain or hurt, how do you typically respond? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ I keep myself busy to avoid thinking about it.
- ☐ I try to push through the pain and continue with my day.
- ☐ I talk to someone I trust about it.
- ☐ I withdraw and avoid talking about it.
- ☐ I ignore it and focus on other things.
- ☐ I get angry or frustrated.
- ☐ I feel overwhelmed and shut down emotionally.
- ☐ I try to "fix" the situation as quickly as possible.
- ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

Do you typically feel better after your initial response, or does the pain linger?

.....

.....

What are the consequences of your typical emotional responses? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ It helps me avoid discomfort and move on quickly.
- ☐ I feel detached, and it doesn't get resolved.
- ☐ I feel more exhausted, and my emotional state worsens over time.
- ☐ I feel disconnected from others because I avoid dealing with it.
- ☐ I notice physical symptoms, like tension, headaches, or fatigue.
- ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

What would happen if you gave yourself the space to address the emotional wound instead of pushing it aside?

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Worksheets for Reflection and Practice

Worksheet 2: Stop and Reflect

Prompts to help you pause and create space in emotionally charged moments.

What is the immediate thought that crosses your mind when you're upset or hurt? How do you usually respond to these thoughts? Is this response helping you or increasing your distress?

What's the first thing you could do to slow down and create space for clarity? Can you count to ten, take deep breaths, or step away from the situation? How might taking this pause change the outcome of your emotional response? Have you tried it?

Worksheets for Reflection and Practice

Worksheet 3: Grounding Techniques

Which of the following grounding techniques works best for you?

- Breathing: Take five deep breaths, noticing how the air feels as it enters and leaves your body.
- Touch: Place your hands on something solid, like a table or chair. Focus on the sensation of contact.
- Movement: Take a few slow steps, noticing how your feet feel on the ground.

After grounding yourself, how do you feel in your body and mind? Do you feel less overwhelmed or more present? What effect does grounding have on your emotional state?

Worksheets for Reflection and Practice

Worksheet 4: Identifying and Acknowledging Emotions

Try to name at least one emotion you're experiencing right now. What triggered this emotion? Was it something external (e.g., an event or interaction)? Or did it arise internally (e.g., thoughts, memories)?

What healthier response could you choose instead? Can you sit with the emotion for a moment and allow it to pass? How can you process this emotion in a way that doesn't overwhelm or control you?

Worksheets for Reflection and Practice

Worksheet 5: Self-Compassion Practices

When something goes wrong, how do you usually speak to yourself? Are you self-critical, blaming, or harsh? How might you reframe this self-talk to be more compassionate?

What is one small, kind gesture you can do for yourself today? This could be taking a break, going for a walk, or treating yourself with care in another way.

Worksheets for Reflection and Practice

Worksheet 6: Post-Incident Reflection

After the emotional crisis has passed, consider these questions to help you integrate the experience and learn from it.

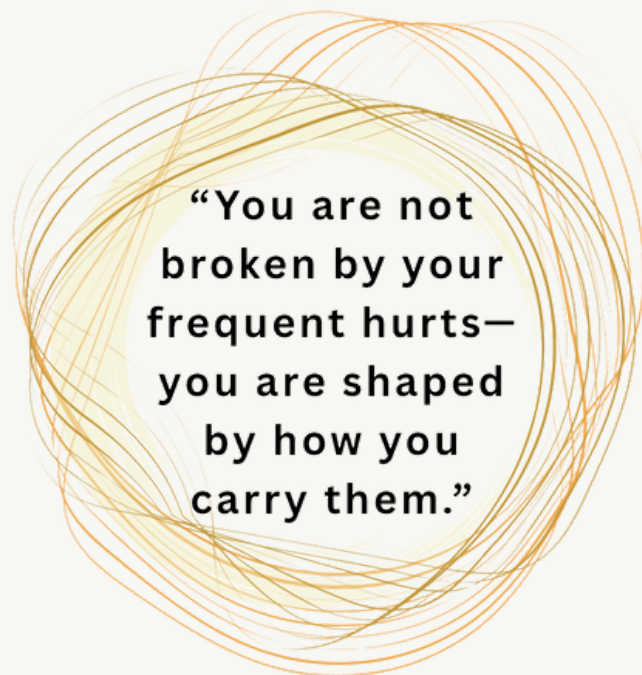
What was the source of the emotional distress? Was the event truly as overwhelming as it felt in the moment? Did your initial reaction serve you well? If not, what would you do differently next time?

What is one small, kind gesture you can do for yourself today This could be taking a break, going for a walk, or treating yourself with care in another way.

Conclusion

You now have a toolkit for those inevitable moments when life hits hard. These tools are here for you whenever emotions feel overwhelming or difficult to handle. Remember: every time you pause, show yourself compassion, and get the lesson from what you experienced, you're building emotional strength that will serve you for years to come.

This emotional first aid process is just one of over 60 practical activities you'll find in *How Deep Is the Wound?*, each designed to help you understand and resolve your emotional pain more effectively.



How Deep is the Wound?

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Notes

Thanks!

Thank you for signing up and taking the first step toward better understanding and managing your emotional health. By downloading this Emotional First Aid Kit, you've begun a journey of awareness, healing, and growth—one that can empower you to respond to emotional challenges with clarity, compassion, and resilience.

Next Steps:

You now have a tool to begin addressing your emotional wounds with awareness and self-care, but this is only the start.

If you found this workbook beneficial, I encourage you to continue exploring what else *How Deep Is the Wound?* has to offer.

Here's how you can move forward:

1. Grab your copy of ***How Deep is the Wound?*** (if you haven't already) on Amazon (<https://amzn.to/4moEouQ>) or other bookstores.
2. Visit the book's webpage for more in-depth resources, news, and promotions at <https://www.antonietacontreras.com/how-deep-is-the-wound-book>.
3. Follow me on your preferred platform to stay updated on the latest news and content. Just look for Antonieta Contreras
- 4 Share this promotion with your friends, and they will receive their own copy. Simply invite them to sign up, and they too can benefit from the valuable resources and insights provided in *How Deep Is the Wound?*

