A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Let Go of the Past, Live Lighter

Nine simple, research-backed ways to set down old hurts, grudges and regrets, and feel lighter.



www.forwardstepsblog.com

You can't change the past.
You can stop carrying it.

A few small daily habits help you put down what's been weighing on you.



WRITING REALLY HELPS

146

studies on writing about your feelings, pooled together, show a small but real benefit

Frattaroli, Psychological Bulletin, 2006



STEP OUTSIDE

90 min

walk in nature reduced how much people dwelled on negative thoughts. A city walk didn't.

Bratman et al., PNAS, 2015

FORGIVING CAN BE LEARNED

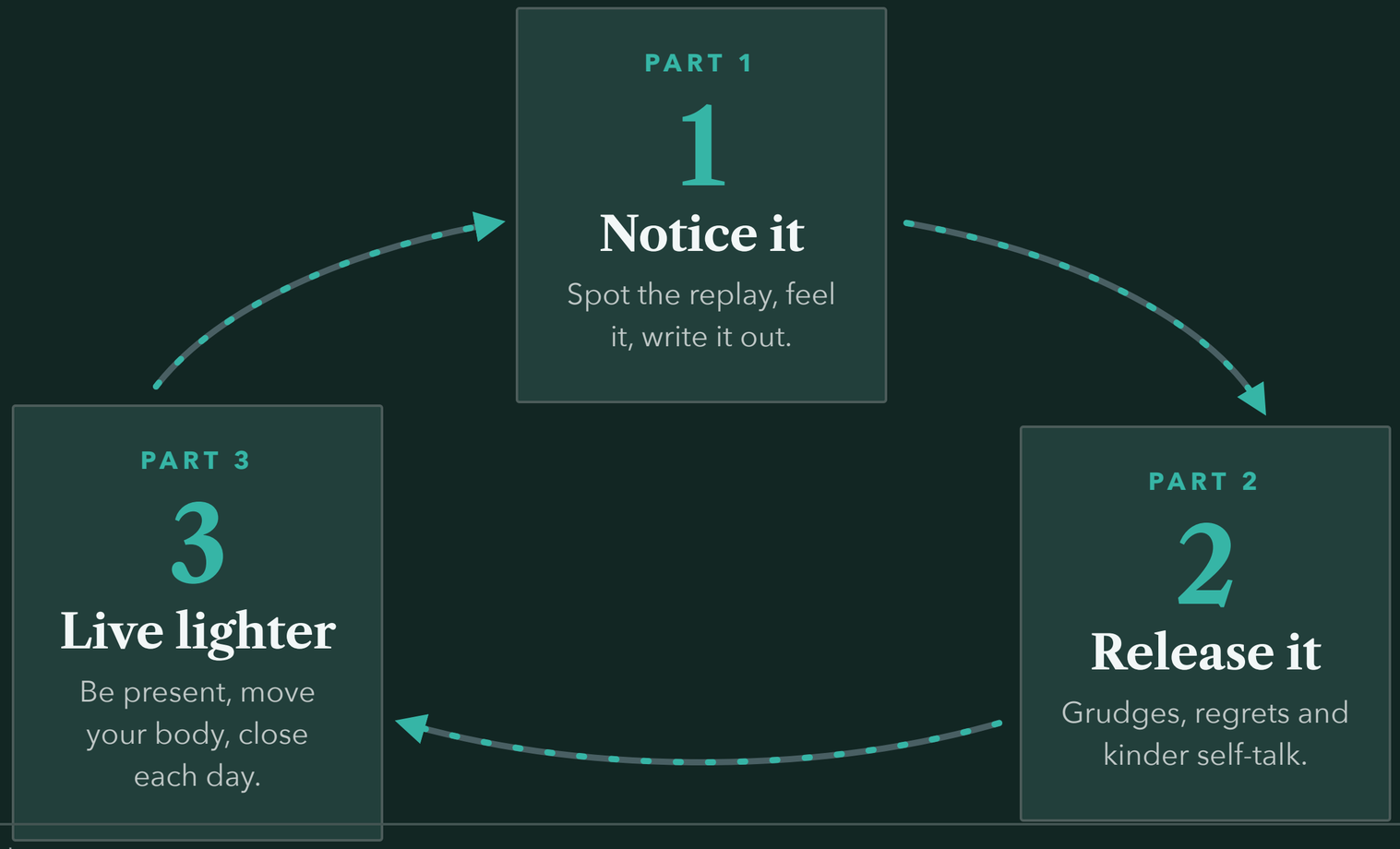
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research reports on guided forgiveness programs: people who took part forgave more

Wade et al., Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 2014

HOW THIS GUIDE WORKS

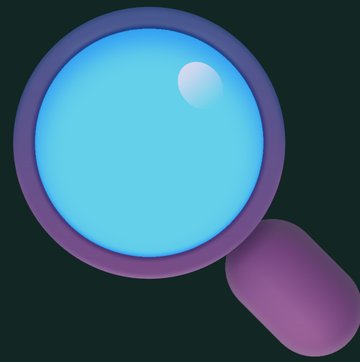
Three parts, nine habits





1

Notice it



See what you're carrying before you set it down.

HABIT 1 · NOTICE IT

Spot the loop

Your brain loves to rerun old scenes and play "what if". Catch the loop, then look at the thought like a chair or a tree: just a thing.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Notice the phrases that start the loop.
- ✓ Say to yourself: "There's that thought again."

🔁 What if...

😣 If only...

🙈 I should have...

😤 How could they

🌀 Not this again



INSTEAD OF



Pushing the feeling down and hoping it fades

TRY



Naming it: "I feel hurt, and that's okay."

HABIT 2 · NOTICE IT

Feel it fully

Ignoring a feeling doesn't make it leave. It's okay to feel sad, angry or hurt. Name the feeling, let it be there, and let it pass.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Finish the line: "Right now I feel..."
- ✓ A good cry is a release, not a weakness.

10:00

HABIT 3 · NOTICE IT

Write it out

Give the feeling somewhere to go. Spend ten minutes writing what's on your mind, how it feels, and one small thing you'll do about it.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Try: "What feeling have I been avoiding?"
- ✓ Write freely. No one else has to read it.

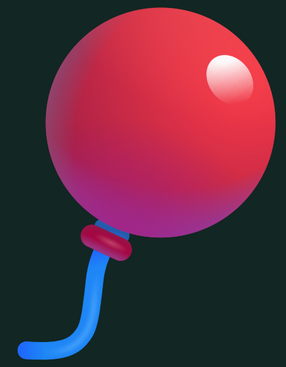
PROMPT	MY ANSWER
I feel...	→ Hurt and tired
Because...	→ She never called
Today I'll...	→ Go for a walk



2

Release it

Loosen the grip of grudges and regret.



> **It's on your plate. You don't have to eat it.**

HABIT 4 · RELEASE IT

Set it aside

Picture resentment as a food you hate, sitting next to a meal you love. You can see it's there without eating it. Ask: what good has this grudge done me?

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Fill in: "What good has holding on to ___ done?"
- ✓ Holding a grudge doesn't make you a bad person.



WHY IT HELPS

Calmer

Imagining forgiving someone, instead of nursing a grudge, left people feeling more in control and calmer in body.

Witvliet, Ludwig & Vander Laan, Psychological Science, 2001

HABIT 5 · RELEASE IT

Ask what's next

Treat regret as feedback, not a verdict. Find the lesson it holds, then turn that lesson into one action you can take this week.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Keep a chart: regret, lesson, next step.
- ✓ Review it once a month.

1. 🔍 Name the regret in one sentence
2. 💡 Write the lesson it taught you
3. ✅ Pick one action that puts it to use





Turn down the inner critic.

HABIT 6 · RELEASE IT

Speak kindly

Speak to yourself the way you'd speak to a good friend who made a mistake. Try a letter to your past self, then write back with forgiveness.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Ask: "What would I say to a friend here?"
- ✓ Try: "I did my best with what I knew then."

3

Live lighter

Come back to now, and keep moving forward.



HABIT 7 · LIVE LIGHTER

Be here now

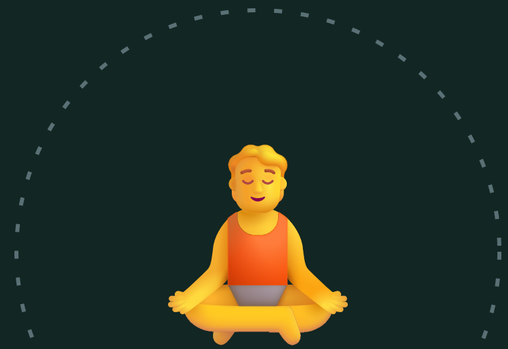
The past and future aren't here. Right now is. When your mind drifts, use your senses to bring it back, and simply notice without judging.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Take three slow breaths and look around.
- ✓ Notice, don't judge. Just observe.

👀 **What you see**

👂 **What you hear**



✋ **What you can touch**

👃 **What you smell**

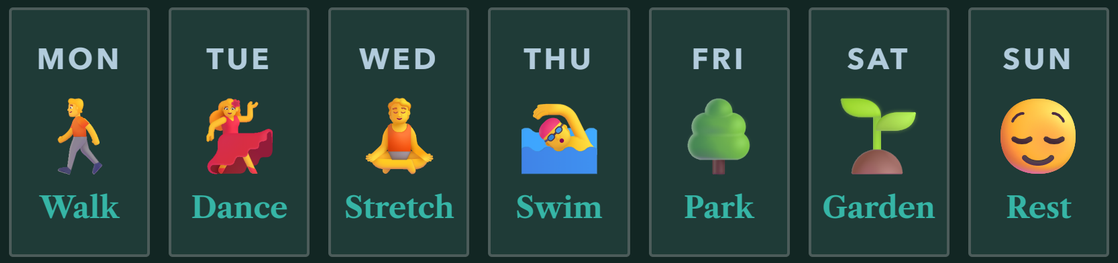
Your senses bring you back to now.



HABIT 8 · LIVE LIGHTER

Move it out

Your body and mood are closely linked. Any movement that gets your heart going counts, and you can split it up across the week however you like.



Any movement counts. Mix it up.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Walk outside, in a park or green space, when you can.
- ✓ Add good sleep, water and fresh food.

HOW MUCH TO AIM FOR

150 min

of moderate activity a week is the minimum global recommendation for adults

World Health Organization, 2020



HABIT 9 · LIVE LIGHTER

Close the day

Before bed, write down anything still bugging you and one thing you're grateful for. Then let it rest: "I did my best with what I knew."

5

minutes each night



Write what lingers, one thank-you, then let it rest.

TRY IT TODAY

- ✓ Keep a notebook by your bed.
- ✓ Same time each night makes it a habit.

YOUR PLAN

Pick two to start today

- 🔁 Catch one replay loop
- 💛 Name a feeling out loud
- 📝 Write for ten minutes
- 🍽️ Ask what good the grudge has done
- 💡 Turn one regret into a next step
- 💌 Write a kind letter to your past self
- 👀 Come back to your senses once a day
- 🚶 Take a walk outside
- 🙏 Note one thing you're grateful for
- 🌙 Try the nightly let-go ritual



BONUS

Your 7-day let-go log

Print this page and fill it in each evening. Small releases count.

DAY	WHAT'S LINGERING	THE FEELING	LESSON OR NEXT STEP	GRATEFUL FOR
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				



IMPORTANT

When to get extra support

- Sadness, anger or worry that hangs on most days for weeks
- Changes in sleep, appetite or energy that won't settle
- A past event that keeps replaying and gets in the way of daily life
- Feeling you have no one you can talk to about it

A counselor, therapist or your doctor can help. If you ever feel unsafe, contact your local emergency number.

This guide is general information, not medical advice.



YOUR NEXT STEP

Start today with *one small release.*

Pick the habit that feels easiest, try it today, and notice how much lighter you feel.

Choose your first habit now



SOURCES

The research behind this guide

Frattaroli J. Experimental disclosure and its moderators: A meta-analysis. Psychological Bulletin, 2006.

Bratman GN, Hamilton JP, Hahn KS, Daily GC, Gross JJ. Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. PNAS, 2015.

Wade NG, Hoyt WT, Kidwell JE, Worthington EL. Efficacy of psychotherapeutic interventions to promote forgiveness: A meta-analysis. J Consult Clin Psychol, 2014.

Witvliet CvO, Ludwig TE, Vander Laan KL. Granting forgiveness or harboring grudges: Implications for emotion, physiology, and health. Psychological Science, 2001.

World Health Organization. WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour. Geneva: WHO, 2020.

